THE NATURE OF EVANGELISM IN THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF JOHN WESLEY

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Alexander Lionel Boraine
Drew University
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PREFACE

The Church is called into being by the Word of God for the express purpose of carrying forward the redemptive work begun in Christ. In order that the Church might fulfill this task it must constantly live under the Word. Evangelism is that which describes the obedient response of the Church to the Word in its proclamation of the Word in the world. Evangelism, therefore, is the life-blood of the Church. It is never a possession of the Church, rather the Church is utterly dependent upon the Word to which it gives itself in the act of faith. In light of the central importance of the evangelistic task it is crucial that the Church should constantly examine the nature of evangelism.

In that movement of English history designated as the Evangelical Revival John Wesley occupies a place of significance. As one of the leaders in the revival of religion which took place in eighteenth century England, Wesley has been described as one of the outstanding evangelists in the history of the Church. This project is embarked upon in the hope that it may add to a clearer appreciation of Wesley as evangelist and with the conviction that his understanding of the evangelistic task can speak creatively to the understanding of the Church as mission.

John Wesley has not lacked for biographers and the overwhelming majority of writers have concentrated on his life and work. In recent years, however, a number of books have appeared which focus

upon Wesley's theology.[1] But few writers have attempted to discuss the correlation between Wesley's thought and his work. Considering the importance of evangelism and Wesley's significant contribution in this area it is remarkable that so little attention has been given to the nature of evangelism in his theology and practice.

Almost sixty years ago Richard Green wrote a book entitled, John Wesley: Evangelist. However, Green does not attempt a study of the nature of Wesley's evangelism so much as a detailed account of Wesley's early period and a biographical account of his subsequent ministry. W. L. Doughty's book, John Wesley: Preacher comes close to what we have in mind. However, this work falls short of our intention on two counts. Firstly, as the title suggests, the author presents an informative and valuable treatment of Wesley as preacher, but Wesley's understanding of the task of evangelism is not limited to preaching but embraces his whole life. Secondly, although Doughty does devote a chapter to the 'subjects' on which Wesley preached, he offers a scant three pages to the 'fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith'. The balance of the chapter is taken up with the speculative and miscellaneous topics preached on by Wesley. But Doughty's preoccupation with method at the expense of content is not only untrue to the proper understanding of evangelism but is especially misleading as far as Wesley is concerned. In 1967 a book by A. Skevington-Wood was published under the title The Burning Heart in which the author sets out to investigate John Wesley's approach to evangelism. Despite the excellence of this work, Wood does not appear to see that for Wesley the Evangel is prior to evangelism and

[1] See Bibliography.

he too spends a disproportionate amount of time on the work of the evangelist and makes no real attempt to understand the theological imperative which informed Wesley's evangelism. Further, Wood does not develop to any extent the central significance of holiness both as the means to evangelism as well as the end of evangelism in Wesley's thought.

The title of this study has been chosen with some care. Wesley's evangelism was theological and practical and in that order. An inquiry into the nature of evangelism in the thought of Wesley must include an inquiry into his theological content as well as his practice. For Wesley, content and method are always held together.

In order to arrive at the nature of evangelism in the theology and practice of John Wesley there are four areas to which we must address ourselves. Firstly, we must attempt to discover how Wesley himself understood his mission and the motive for his incessant and compulsive preaching and teaching which took him throughout the British Isles and beyond and which lasted for some fifty years. Secondly, we must ascertain the essential content of Wesley's preaching and teaching. How did Wesley conceive the gospel entrusted to him? Thirdly, insofar as Wesley's evangelistic mission was not carried out in a vacuum, we must consider the situation in which he proclaimed the gospel. What were the major theological movements over against which Wesley stood? What was the condition of the Church in eighteenth century England? How much did these factors shape the form of Wesley's evangelism? Finally, we must consider the means of evangelism employed by Wesley. To what extent are these means informed by Wesley's theology?

To establish the significance of these ingredients for Wesley's

understanding of the evangelistic task the following methodology is employed. In Part I entitled, "Wesley's Understanding of his Mission," it is maintained that he was "An Evangelist From the Beginning." That is, it will be shown that Wesley's evangelistic concern did not begin with his Aldersgate conversion, as is generally supposed, but that it began at least as early as 1725.

Part II concentrates upon "The Content of the Gospel" because it will become obvious that Wesley's evangelism presupposed the Evangel. Throughout his long and fruitful ministry Wesley's primary concern was with the What of evangelism rather than the How. It will be seen that the content of the gospel as proclaimed by Wesley was a focusing upon the fundamentals of the faith. In Chapter II entitled, "The Grace of God for Fallen Man," it is shown that the evangelist's emphasis is upon the main design of God's deed in Jesus Christ and the shape of man's need. In Chapter III, "God's Purpose for the Believer," it is asserted that for Wesley the evangelistic appeal for conversion is not the end of the evangelist's mission. He must also declare the character of the new life into which man is summoned by God's deed. It will be shown too what constituted the holy life in Wesley's thought. In recounting the major emphases of Wesley's evangelical theology it is inevitable that we shall cover ground familiar to Wesleyan scholars. Our concern is with the correlation of Wesley's theology and practice, and within this correlation his concern for justification and sanctification; therefore, it is imperative to rehearse his teaching on essential doctrine in order to draw our conclusions.

Part III, "The Proclamation of the Gospel," is also divided into two chapters. In the first, which is entitled, "The Urgency of the

Gospel," consideration will be given to the situation in which Wesley did the work of an evangelist. It will be shown that although the form of Wesley's evangelism was to some extent shaped by the prevailing theological and spiritual climate of his day, it did not add materially to the essential gospel as witnessed to in Scripture, interpreted in the teaching of his Church, and confirmed in his own experience. The sense of urgency which characterized the life and work of Wesley was communicated to him by the gospel itself. It was on the basis of what he understood to be Scriptural Christianity that he refuted Deism, Calvinism, Antinomianism and, above all, the indifference and complacency of the Church. Nevertheless, because he believed that these were short circuiting the work of God the Evangelist, Wesley's sense of urgency was deepened and sharpened. In other words, there are two poles which influenced Wesley's sense of urgency: the givenness of Divine revelation and his concern for the world in which he proclaimed this saving Word.

Chapter V, "The Means of Evangelism," not only indicates the various means employed by Wesley, but also shows how his theology informed these means. Attention will be given to the distinction which Wesley makes between the "Instituted Means" and the "Prudential Means." Wesley gave priority to the What of evangelism but never at the expense of the How. He was eminently successful in holding the What and the How together. Wesley was an evangelical theologian whose theological work was never thought of in speculative terms. His theology was always at the service of the proclamation. He was also an evangelical theologian whose theology informed his evangelism.

In 1964 Albert Outler, in his volume on John Wesley in The Library of Protestant Thought series, charged that arising out of the

neglect of Wesley's thought Wesley has been placed in the wrong categories. In order to overcome this misunderstanding, Outler has included in his book a number of Wesley's most important writings. We support Outler's thesis at this point and with deliberate intent have, as far as possible, allowed Wesley to speak for himself. It is especially important that Wesley should speak for himself on the subject in which he made his greatest contribution and the one on which he has often been misinterpreted most of all. Unfortunately, many Wesleyan interpreters have detached Wesley's theological awareness from his 'warmed heart' and in so doing have seen him through nineteenth century spectacles as a prototype of the revivalists of that period, the majority of whom sat lightly on Christian tradition. When Wesley is allowed to speak for himself concerning the nature of his evangelism, it will become clear that he cannot be placed in nineteenth century revivalist categories.

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PART I

WESLEY'S UNDERSTANDING OF HIS MISSION

CHAPTER I

AN EVANGELIST FROM THE BEGINNING

John Wesley's many biographers are agreed on at least one point--notwithstanding his many other accomplishments Wesley was primarily an evangelist.[1] It is all the more surprising, therefore, to discover that Wesley himself never makes explicit reference to evangelism and rarely describes himself self-consciously as an evangelist.[2] Further, Wesley does not align himself with the Evangelical party within the Church of England which was parallel to the Methodist movement in eighteenth century England.[3]

In the New Testament the word 'evangelist' is used only three times and Wesley comments briefly on each of these. "And the next day we departed and came to Caesarea: and entering into

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[1]Henry Moore, The Life of John Wesley, (2 vols.; London: 1824-1825); Luke Tyerman, The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, (3 vols.; London: 1870-1871); Albert Outler, ed. John Wesley, A Library of Protestant Thought, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Colin Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today, (London: Epworth Press, 1960); Williams expresses this theologically, "The central focus of Wesley's theology is on the saving work of Christ and the human appropriation of that work." p. 41.

[2]Unlike Martin Luther. "If I should want to boast, I should glory in God that I am one of the apostles and evangelists in German lands. . ." D. Martin Luthers Werke, ed. by J.F.K. Knaake, et al., (Weimar Gesamtausgabe, 1883ff.), VIII, p. 683. cf. A. Skevington-Wood, The Burning Heart, (England: The Paternoster Press, 1967), p. 76.

[3]Charles J. Abbey and John H. Overton, The English Church in the Eighteenth Century, (2 vols.; London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1878), II, pp. 60-61. cf. L.E. Elliott-Binns, The Early Evangelicals, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1953), p. 132f.

the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we abode with him" (Acts 21:8). Wesley's comment is brief and to the point, "An evangelist was a preacher of the gospel to those who had never heard it."[4] The second New Testament reference is, "And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). Wesley's comment is more expansive and gives greater insight into his understanding of the office of an evangelist:

> And, among other His free gifts, he gave some apostles - His chief ministers and special witnesses, as having seen Him after His resurrection, and received their commission immediately from Him. And some prophets, and some evangelists - A prophet testifies of things to come; an evangelist of things past; and that chiefly by preaching the gospel before or after any of the apostles. All these were extraordinary officers. The ordinary were: Some pastors - watching over their several flocks. And some teachers - Whether of the same or a lower order, to assist them, as occasion might require.[5]

The third and final reference is II Timothy 4:5, "But watch thou in all things, endure affliction, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill thy ministry." Wesley adds nothing of consequence to what he has already said on the two previous passages, "Do the work of an evangelist - which was next to that of an apostle."[6]

Wesley's single reference to the work of an evangelist in

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[4] John Wesley, Explanatory Notes on the New Testament, p. 481. First published in 1754, the Notes are based very largely on the Gnomon Novi Testamenti by Bengelius.

[5] Ibid., p. 713. Wesley's distinction between extraordinary and ordinary officers is significant as will be seen later in this chapter.

[6] Ibid., p. 795.

his sermons is in his sermon, The Ministerial Office. In this sermon a large part of which contains a strong rebuke to those of his preachers who had administered the sacraments or were contemplating doing so, Wesley distinguishes between the office of Pastor and Evangelist:

> So the great Highpriest of our profession sent Apostles and Evangelists to proclaim glad tidings to all the world; and then Pastors, Preachers, and Teachers, to build up in the faith the congregations that should be founded. But I do not find that ever the office of an Evangelist was the same with that of a Pastor, frequently called a Bishop. He presided over the flock, and administered the sacraments: the former assisted him, and preached the word, either in one or more congregations. I cannot prove from any part of the New Testament, or from any author of the three first centuries, that the office of an Evangelist gave any man a right to act as a Pastor or Bishop.[7]

In his Concise Ecclesiastical History Wesley lists the several orders of ministry in the Primitive Church:

> The Extraordinary teachers whom Christ employed to lay the foundations of his kingdom, were the twelve apostles, and the seventy disciples. To these the Evangelists are to be added, by which title those were distinguished, whom the Apostles sent to instruct the nation, or who, of their

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[7] The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., ed. Thomas Jackson, (14 vols.; 3rd ed.; London: 1829-1831), VII, p. 275. Jackson appends a significant note regarding this sermon: "Respecting this Sermon the following information is given by Mr. Moore, in his "Life of Mr. Wesley" vol. ii, p. 339: "I was with Mr. Wesley in London when he published that Sermon. He had encouraged me to be a man of one book; and he had repeatedly invited me to speak fully whatever objection I had to anything which he spoke or published. I thought that some things in that discourse were not to be found in THE BOOK; and I resolved to tell him so the first opportunity. . .I observed, 'Sir, you know that the Evangelists Timothy and Titus were ordered by the Apostle to ordain Bishops in every place; and surely they could not impart to them an authority which they did not themselves possess.' He looked earnestly at me for some time, but not with displeasure. He made no reply, and soon introduced another subject. I said no more. The man of one book would not dispute against it. I believe he saw, his love to the Church, from which he never deviated unnecessarily, had, in this instance, led him a little too far." cf. Chapter V where Wesley's distinction between the priestly and prophetic offices is taken up.

> own accord, abandoned every worldly attachment, and consecrated themselves to the sacred office of propagating the gospel.[8]

The remaining specific reference to the work of an evangelist to be found in the Wesley corpus is also the most significant. It occurs in the lengthy and important correspondence between Wesley and John Smith.[9] The latter charges that he knows of no call that Wesley had to "preach up and down, to play the part of an itinerant evangelist."[10] To this Wesley responds:

> Perhaps you do not. But I do. I know God hath required this at my hands. To me, his blessing my work is an abundant proof; although such a proof as often makes me tremble. But "is there not pride or vanity in my heart?" There is; yet this is not my motive for preaching. I know and feel that the spring of this is a deep conviction, that it is the will of God, and that were I to refrain, I should never hear that word, "Well done, good and faithful servant;" but "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, where is weeping wailing, and gnashing of teeth."[11]

Wesley's scant references to the office of an Evangelist suggest the reasons why he rarely claimed to be an evangelist and also point to a tension in his thinking regarding the office of Pastor and that of evangelist. In Wesley's understanding the evangelist is essentially

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[8] Concise Ecclesiastical History, (4 vols.; 1781), I, p. 55.

[9] John Smith and Wesley engaged in a lengthy and important correspondence. Moore (Life, II, 61) states that John Smith was an 'archbishop'. If Moore is correct, then there are only two possibilities. John Smith was either Thomas Herring who was Archbishop of Canterbury, 1748-1757, or Thomas Secker who was Archbishop of Canterbury, 1758-1768. However, it is impossible to say for certain which of these two was Wesley's astute correspondent, if indeed it was either of them. A manuscript of the entire correspondence, in Wesley's handwriting, is in the Library of Drew University.

[10] The Letters of John Wesley, A.M., (Standard Edition; London: Epworth Press, 1931), II, p. 96.

[11] Ibid., p. 97.

a preacher of the gospel, an extraordinary messenger who has dedicated himself to this sacred office. The evangelist, however, is under the authority of the Pastor or Bishop and his office is not to be confused with that of a Pastor. Therefore, the evangelist had no brief to administer the sacraments. It is this interpretation of the office of the evangelist which enables Wesley to equate the work of his lay-preachers with that of the New Testament evangelist. Wesley believed that his preachers, like the evangelists in the early church, were there to preach the gospel; they were not pastors and had no authority to administer the sacraments. Further, his preachers, again like the evangelists referred to in the New Testament, were men under authority, and in this instance, under the authority of John Wesley!

This is why Wesley never deliberately describes himself as an evangelist. He was an ordained minister of the Church of England. The only time Wesley did lay claim to be an evangelist was when someone else denied that he had any call to be an 'itinerant evangelist'! And in this instance he equates an evangelist with one who has an overwhelming conviction that God has summoned him to the task of bringing the gospel to all who were ready to hear it.

There is, therefore, an unresolved tension in Wesley's understanding of the office of an evangelist. On the one hand he limits the office very strictly to that of preaching and that under the authority of an ordained minister. This is based on his faulty exegesis of the passage already referred to and, as we shall see, because of his concern to remain within the Church of England. On the other hand, in claiming to be an evangelist himself, he obviously believed that an

ordained minister should also do the work of an evangelist.[12]

Another probable reason for Wesley's not describing himself as anything other than a minister of the Church of England is that he was chary of adopting specific titles for himself. Kissack points out, in another context, "Wesley was singularly reticent about using words of accepted ecclesiological circulation about himself."[13]

Nevertheless it is permissible and even appropriate to describe Wesley as an evangelist. It is permissible on the understanding that the evangelist is a messenger raised up by God to preach the Gospel, but that it is not impossible for the office of pastor and evangelist to be invested in one man. It is appropriate because Wesley devoted the greater part of his life as a proclaimer of the εὐαγγέλιον or Gospel. (Gk. εὐαγγελιστής)

It is widely held that Wesley became an evangelist on May 24, 1738, but it will be shown that the spirit of the evangelist was within Wesley a long time before this. In order to demonstrate this evangelical concern it will be necessary to consider at least the critical, or turning points of his life. However, as this study is not intended to be yet another exhaustive treatment of Wesley's life, attention will only be given to those incidents which, it is believed, substantiate the conviction that Wesley was an evangelist from the beginning.

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[12] It was in 1746 after reading Lord King's Account of the Primitive Church that Wesley came to believe that "Bishops and presbyters are (essentially) of one order. . ." Journal, III, p. 232. cf. Letters, IV, p. 150 where Wesley reveals that his reading of Stillingfleets Irenicon further influenced him in this direction.

[13] Reginald Kissack, Church or no Church, (London: Epworth Press, 1964), p. 63, footnote 45.

It is not possible to state with any confidence the terminus a quo for Wesley's evangelical spirit. However, an incident occurred as early as the middle of 1725 which suggests that even before his ordination Wesley felt a sense of responsibility for the spiritual welfare of his fellow students.[14] In one of his many letters to his mother Wesley describes the incident:

> About a year and a half ago I stole out of company at eight in the evening with a young gentleman with whom I was intimate. As we took a turn in an aisle of St. Mary's Church in expectation of a young lady's funeral with whom we were both acquainted, I asked him if he really thought himself my friend; and if he did, why he would not do me all the good he could. He began to protest; in which I cut him short by desiring him to oblige me in an instance which he could not deny to be in his own power - to let me have the pleasure of making him a whole Christian, to which I knew he was at least half persuaded already; that he could not do me a greater kindness, as both of us would be fully convinced when we came to follow that young woman.[15]

Richard Green writes of this passage as "the first recorded instance of that direct appeal to individuals on the subject of personal religion which he afterwards practiced on every available opportunity and with such signal results."[16]

That this was no isolated instance and that Wesley's concern for his students was also evangelical in character is shown by a further letter to his mother wherein he describes the method he

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[14] John Wesley was ordained to the diaconate by Bishop Potter of Oxford on Sunday, September 19, 1725. Six months later Wesley was elected to a fellowship at Lincoln College, Oxford.

[15] Letters, Vol. 1, p. 40. The name of the 'young gentleman' was Robin Griffiths. He died on January 10, 1727. Wesley preached the sermon at his funeral.

[16] Richard Green, John Wesley: Evangelist, (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1905), p. 54.

followed when he was entrusted with a student "who is first to understand and practice, and then to teach, the law of Christ."[17] Wesley continues:

> I endeavour, by an intermixture of reading and conversation, to show him what that law is, - that is, to renounce all subordinate love of the world, and to love and obey God with all his strength. When he appears seriously sensible of this, I propose to him the means God hath commanded him to use in order to that end; and, a week, or a month, or a year after, as the state of his soul seems to require it, the several prudential means recommended by wise and good men.[18]

That the Holy Club had as one of its primary objectives an attempt to persuade all men to become Christians is clear from a letter of Wesley's.[19] In October, 1732, several years after the Holy Club came into existence, Wesley wrote at great length to Richard Morgan in connection with the death of the latter's son.[20] In this letter there is contained a detailed description of the early beginnings of the Holy Club and in particular the questions which were put to the members.[21] Under Section one the fourth question reads as follows:

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[17] Letters, Vol. I, p. 138.

[18] Ibid., see also page 161, footnote, for further evidence of Wesley's concern for the spiritual welfare of his students.

[19] When John Wesley returned to Oxford from Epworth in 1729, he found a society which had been begun by Charles Wesley and was attended by a handful of students. John soon became the accepted leader.

[20] William Morgan, a founding member of the Holy Club, had died in insanity and the Holy Club had been blamed for his death because of the supposed rigorous fasting which the members were expected to practice. In his letter Wesley answers the charge by showing that fasting only came to play a serious role in the Holy Club in the last six months and that William Morgan had left off fasting eighteen months before his death.

[21] Letters, Vol. I, p. 128.

> Whether we can be happy at all hereafter unless we have, according to our power 'fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited those that are sick and in prison'; and made all these actions subservient to an higher purpose, even the saving of souls from death?[22]

This same emphasis is equally stressed in the first question under Section Two:

> Have I in speaking to a stranger explained what religion is not? (not negative, not external); and what it is? (a recovery of the image of God); searched at what step in it he stops, and what makes him stop there? exhorted and directed him?[23]

It is reasonable to assume that as leader of the Holy Club it was John Wesley who gave the Club its evangelical drive. To read the above questions conjures up the fascinating picture of a group of students and at least one tutor engaging both town and gown in serious conversation concerning their eternal destiny! It is clear that Wesley as student, as tutor and as leader of the Holy Club was possessed with an earnest desire to make men 'whole Christians'.

Yet another of Wesley's letters, to his father this time, affords a further clue as to his understanding of his mission. The occasion for the letter was the rapidly declining health of his father who had written and requested John to accept the living at Epworth. In rejecting his father's offer Wesley outlines his reasons for his decision to remain at Oxford.[24] He agrees with his father that "the glory of God

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Works, Vol. XI, p. 522. Note the insistence on 'internal religion' and the concern to recover God's original intention for man, long before Aldersgate.

[24] Here we have an early indication of Wesley's conviction that ministry is not confined to the parish and his view that his own place of ministry was not necessarily restricted to working in one parish or another.

and the different degrees of promoting it are to be our sole consideration and direction in the choice of any course of life."[25] Wesley continues, "I do not say the glory of God is to be my first or my principal consideration, but my only one."[26] It is important to understand what Wesley meant by 'the glory of God'. His brother's hymn suggests a link between personal salvation and the glory of God:

> A charge to keep I have
> A God to glorify
> A never-dying soul to save
> And fit it for the sky.[27]

Elsewhere Wesley explicitly links his 'only consideration' with his quest for personal holiness and to promote holiness in others. "That course of life tends most to the glory of God wherein we can most promote holiness in ourselves and others."[28] In other words, although Wesley had what amounted to an obsession to save his own soul, he never saw his personal quest for salvation in isolation from his fellow men. In fact, it is for the sake of 'others' that he is chiefly concerned about his own salvation! This is an aspect of Wesley's understanding of his mission which has constantly been overlooked by the interpreters of Wesley's life and thought. But Wesley leaves us in no doubt:

> To prove that the holier any man is in himself the more shall he promote holiness in others, there needs no more than this one postulatum, the help which is done on earth God does it Himself. If so, if God be the sole agent in

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[25] Letters, Vol. I, p. 167.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Wesley Hymn Book, ed. Franz Hildebrandt (London: A Weekes and Co., Ltd., Second Impression, 1960), p. 51.

[28] For a full treatment of the central place of 'holiness' in Wesley's thought see below, Part II, Chapter II, 'The Purpose of God for Believers'.

> healing souls, and man only the instrument in His hand, there can no doubt be made but that the more holy a man is He will make use of Him the more: because he is more willing to be so used; because the more pure he is, he is the fitter instrument for the GOD of purity; because he will pray more and more earnestly that he may be employed, and that his service may tend to his Master's glory; because all his prayers, both for employment and success therein, will the more surely pierce the clouds; because the more his heart is enlarged, the wider sphere he may act in without carefulness or distraction; and lastly, because the more his heart is renewed in the image of God, the more God can renew it in others by him without destroying him by pride or vanity.[29]

Wesley's decision to remain at Oxford rather than take over his father's parish had far wider implications than merely his desire to promote holiness in himself and to be surrounded by a group of intimates who would watch over his soul. Wesley is wrestling with the deep question of God's purpose for man in the world. His conclusion is that man is created to glorify his Creator. Man does this by serving his fellowmen. But every man has succumbed to the fateful disease of sin and only the Divine Physician can bring healing. The image of God has been defaced and only when this is restored can man glorify God in the service of his fellows. It is God's plan to use men as instruments to further His healing work but no man can be a fit instrument until he has been healed or restored. Wesley's ambition is to be an instrument in the hand of the Healer; therefore, he must first seek to be saved before he can save others. Holiness is a prerequisite to evangelism. For Wesley, holiness is paramount but not only because this is required of the holy God but because the end of holiness is evangelism. His pursuit of healing and holiness is in order that he may glorify God in the service of his fellow men. The second stanza of the hymn quoted

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[29] Letters, Vol. I, p. 172.

above is as follows:

> To serve the present age,
> my calling to fulfill:
> O may it all my powers engage
> to do my Master's will.[30]

V. H. H. Green has done signal service in correcting the idea, held by many, of Wesley being a social recluse during his stay at Oxford. By judicious use of the Diaries, Green has given a picture of a young man who despite his inner struggle to discover and carry out God's will for his life was nevertheless engaged in many of the pastimes of his day. Writing of Wesley as he is revealed in his Diary of 1730 Green notes "although Wesley was as far as possible rationing time to serve the more serious pursuits of life, he neither withdrew from social life nor ceased to take part in the normal recreation of Oxford."[31]

However, in the entries for 1731 Green notes "a very slow withdrawal."[32] And referring to John's letter to his brother Samuel on the eve of his departure to Georgia Green concludes:

> The letter revealed the great change that had taken place in Wesley since he returned a tutor to Lincoln in 1729. He had shed slowly but surely his many human interests and activities to become a man of one idea; the academic was transformed into the evangelist. The field of vision had narrowed but was illumined by a glowing sense of vocation.[33]

Whilst Green is correct in substance two important qualifications need to be made to his conclusion. Firstly, it is unfortunate that Green

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[30] Wesley Hymn Book, p. 51.

[31] V.H.H. Green, The Young Mr. Wesley, (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1961), p. 135. The activities which Wesley notes in his diary include dancing, attending concerts, boating, walking, dining, and playing cards.

[32] Ibid., p. 164.

[33] Ibid., p. 255.

should oppose the academic man with the evangelist. It is hardly the distinction Wesley himself would have made. Secondly, Wesley was an evangelist several years before his departure for Georgia. As early as the middle of 1725 Wesley attempted to make a 'whole Christian of one who was already a half-Christian'. Further, Wesley's approach to his students was evangelical in character and the primary purpose of the Holy Club of which he was the leader was 'the saving of souls from death'. It is, therefore, more correct to say that Wesley was an evangelist from the beginning and that this evangelical spirit was intensified during his stay at Oxford and particularly as leader of the Holy Club.

Despite Wesley's decision to stay at Oxford rather than return to Epworth scarcely six months after his father's death he embarked on the Simmonds as a missionary to Georgia.[34] Two letters written by Wesley prior to his departure reveal his motives for going to Georgia. The first is a letter to his brother Samuel in which he reminds him that:

> You are even now called to the converting of heathen as well as I. So many souls are committed to your charge by God, to be prepared for a happy eternity. You are to instruct them, not only in the beggarly elements of Greek and Latin, but much more in the gospel. You are to labour with all your might to convince them that Christianity is not a negation or an external thing, but a new heart, a mind conformed to that of Christ, 'faith working by love'.[35]

In instructing his brother as to his responsibility John makes obvious reference to his own approach with his students at Oxford. It is clear also that John saw his own purpose in going to Georgia as

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[34] Dr. John Burton, one of the chief trustees of the Georgia Colony, invited John Wesley to transfer the entire Holy Club to Georgia, as missioners to the Indians. In actual fact only three members eventually sailed to Georgia.

[35] Letters, Vol. I, pp. 192-193.

'the converting of the heathen'. The second letter is one written to Dr. Burton who was one of the chief trustees of the colony in Georgia. Referring to his purpose in going to Georgia Wesley writes: "My chief motive, to which all the rest are subordinate, is the hope of saving my own soul. I hope to learn the true sense of the gospel by preaching it to the heathen."[36] At first this appears to be in conflict with an earlier conclusion, namely, that Wesley is not merely concerned to save his own soul but that his concern arises out of the broader concern to save others. But in the same letter Wesley adds:

> I then hope to know what it is to love my neighbour as myself and to feel the powers of that second motive to visit the heathens, even the desire to impart to them what I have received - a saving knowledge of the gospel of Christ.[37]

In other words, the twin motives are really one. Wesley is concerned to save his own soul, to learn the true sense of the gospel so that he may impart it to the heathen. The same reason which decided him to remain at Oxford now sent him forth to Georgia. Wesley's scriptural warrant for making the 'saving of his own soul' the first priority is found in his explicit reference to St. Luke, Chapter 22, verse 31 and 32.[38]

> But I am assured, If I be once fully converted myself, He will then employ me both to strengthen my brethren and to preach His name to the Gentiles, that the very ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God.[39]

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[36] Ibid., p. 188.

[37] Ibid., p. 190.

[38] St. Luke 22:31-32. "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, Behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou are converted, strengthen thy brethren." A.V.

[39] Letters, Vol. I, p. 190.

Edwards is, therefore, only half correct when he states:

> Because he went from the wrong motives and because he had a falsely romantic view of his task he was doomed to disappointment. He went, as he said in a letter to Dr. Burton, in the hope of saving his own soul. He argued that he could not save his soul in England so well as in Georgia.[40]

Edwards does not appear to have understood the link between Wesley's personal quest for salvation and his desire to lead all men to salvation. Wesley's quest for holiness is oriented towards evangelism.

Wesley's stay in Georgia has been dealt with by several authors and it will serve no useful purpose in covering this well-trodden ground. Suffice to say that if his stay in Georgia is to be judged by his declared purpose in going there, it must be adjudged a total failure.[41]

He went to Georgia, firstly, in the hope that he would be converted that he might 'strengthen his brethren'. But on the return voyage he writes out of the agony of his soul: "I went to America to convert the Indians, but oh, who shall convert me?"[42] He went to Georgia, secondly, as a missionary to the heathen but spent almost all of his time as a minister to the colonists, most of whom he had antagonized by the time he left for England.

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[40] A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, ed., Rupert E. Davies and Gordon E. Rupp, (London: Epworth Press, 1966), I, p. 46.

[41] Despite the general failure of the visit to Georgia there were several items on the credit side. Wesley's stay in Georgia saw the beginnings of The Christian Library, he began to use religious societies and the select bands which were used so extensively in later years, he employed lay-assistants for the first time, cf. The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., ed., Nehemiah Curnock, (8 vols.; Standard Edition, London: Epworth Press, 1938), I, pp. 425-426.

[42] Ibid., Vol. I, p. 418. See also p. 422. This whole section warrants careful reading. Special attention should be given to the footnotes which Wesley inserted at a later date.

But despite the disappointments, the sense of failure, the return voyage had hardly begun when he "took up the work which provided the connecting link throughout his whole period in America and which once more brings out his real concern. Once again he became a missionary."[43] Also, despite his resolution "to retire out of the world at once. . ." once he returned to England, this in fact did not happen. "We were dragged out again. . . and so carried on. . . without any design except the general one of saving souls."[44] Even in frustration and depression Wesley never ceased from his all engaging concern, that of 'saving souls.'

In assessing the significance of what happened at Aldersgate on May 24, 1738, it is important to bear in mind that Wesley never enthroned the Aldersgate experience as an archetype for every Christian. Instead he reminded his people that:

> There is an irreconcilable variability in the operation of the Holy Spirit in the souls of men, more especially as to the manner of justification. Many find him rushing upon them like a torrent, while they experience the o'erwhelming power of saving grace. . . But in others he works in a different way: He deigns His influence to infuse, sweet, refreshing as the silent dews. . . Let Him take His ways: He is wiser than you.[45]

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[43] Martin Schmidt, John Wesley, A Theological Biography, (London: Epworth Press, 1962), Vol. I, p. 213. Wesley gave instruction in the Christian faith to a Negro youth and sought to be a pastor and messenger of the gospel to his fellow passengers. See also Journal, Vol. I, p. 413f.

[44] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 227.

[45] Letters, Vol. VII, p. 298. See also Vol. V, p. 175: "It is not strange if the leading of one soul be very different from that of another. The same Spirit worketh in every one; and yet worketh several ways, according to His own will. It concerns us to follow our own light, seeing we are not to be judged by another's conscience."

It is a matter for regret that there are many who have come after Wesley who have not been as wise. In other words, whilst Wesley's stress was upon the work of the Holy Spirit and not on his 'warmed heart', many still point to his particular experience as though this was the only avenue to an experience of God. Wesley was able to avoid a stereotyped notion of a dramatic conversion because of his belief in the Holy Spirit, who, wiser than man, takes His own way. But there is a species of evangelism which insists that without a Damascus-Road experience there is no salvation. The sad result is that those whose experience of God can be likened to the slow dawning of a new day rather than the blinding flash of light, are often discouraged and disillusioned.

For Wesley the end of evangelism is not simply a climactic experience but holiness of heart and life. What happened at Aldersgate must be seen in the context of what happened before and what happened after.[46] It has already been shown that from very early on Wesley was concerned to 'glorify God' which he interpreted as serving God as an instrument of healing. His aim, therefore, was to 'save his own soul' in order that he may save others. It was at Aldersgate that he was made aware that salvation could not be earned by self-effort, worthy though his motive may have been, nor even by service but only by grace. It was here that it was brought home to him most powerfully that man is justified by faith alone through the merits of Christ. The 'Glory of God' is to be found in His condescension. God has acted for man in

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[46] See also below, Part II, Chapter II, "The Purpose of God for Believers" where it will become clear that for Wesley the end of evangelism is holiness.

Jesus Christ and invites man to participate in His reconciling work. The major difference which Wesley discovered is that God not only summons a man into His service of reconciliation but that He affords the relationship which enables man to be an instrument in the hands of the Healer.

Wesley himself supplies us the best clue in the distinction which he makes between a 'servant' and a 'son'.[47] Wesley, as we have seen, sought to be a servant but now he becomes conscious of his place in the family of God. The faith of a son he describes as a "sure trust and confidence in God that, through the merits of Christ my sins are forgiven, and I reconciled to the favour of God."[48] This is the faith he sought by dedicated service and this is the faith he received as a gift on that memorable day in May, 1738. A further and fuller illustration of Wesley's new understanding of faith is found in a significant change which he made to a sermon, The Circumcision of the Heart, which he first preached in 1733. The sermon was first published in 1748, and in a footnote Wesley explains that "he had added to the sermon as originally preached the latter half of i.7, in which saving faith is defined as he came to understand it in 1738."[49] In the original sermon

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[47] Journal, Vol. I, p. 423. On his return journey from Georgia Wesley listed the reasons for his conclusion that he was not a Christian. However, at a later date he added a number of significant footnotes, one of which reads: "I had even then the faith of a servant though not that of a son." See also his sermon 'On Faith' in which he explicates his teaching on the difference between 'a servant' and 'a son'. Works, Vol. VII, pp. 199-200.

[48] Ibid., p. 270.

[49] The Standard Sermons of John Wesley, ed., Edward H. Sugden, (2 vols.; London: Epworth Press, 1956), I, p. 265.

faith is defined as:

> An unshaken assent to all that God hath revealed in Scripture and in particular to those important truths, 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners', 'He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world'.[50]

In the insertion after 1738 Wesley adds that faith is 'not only' this:

> But likewise the revelation of Christ in our hearts; a divine evidence or conviction of His love, His free, unmerited love to me a sinner; a sure confidence in His pardoning mercy, wrought in us by the Holy Ghost; a confidence, whereby every true believer is enabled to bear witness, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth', that I have an 'Advocate with the Father', and that 'Jesus Christ the righteous' is my Lord, and 'the propitiation for my sins' I know He hath 'loved me, and given Himself for me' - He hath reconciled me, even me, to God; and 'I have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins'.[51]

That the gift of saving faith resulted not only in the 'warmed heart' but also in a radical change in his preaching and the response to his preaching is evident from Wesley's much later assessment of his preaching which he made in 1746:

> From the year 1725 to 1729 I preached much, but saw no fruit of my labour. Indeed it could not be that I should; for I neither laid the foundation of repentance, or of believing the gospel; taking it for granted, that all to whom I preached were believers, and that many of them 'needed no repentance'.
>
> From the year 1729 to 1734, laying a deeper foundation of repentance, I saw a little fruit. But it was only a little; and no wonder: for I did not preach faith in the blood of the covenant.

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[50] Ibid., p. 270.

[51] Ibid., pp. 270-271. This new definition of faith should be compared with the testimony recorded in the Journal for May 24, 1738. Wesley had always been familiar with the promises of Scripture but now he had appropriated them for himself. Notice also the emphasis upon Assurance of salvation as inherent in faith.

> From 1734 to 1738, speaking more of faith in Christ, I saw more fruit of my preaching, and visiting from house to house, than I ever had done before; though I know not if any of those who were outwardly reformed were inwardly thoroughly converted to God.
>
> From 1738 to this time, speaking continually of Jesus Christ, laying Him only for the foundation of the whole building, making Him all in all, the first and the last; preaching only on this plan, "The kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel" the 'word of God ran' as fire among the stubble; it was glorified more and more; multitudes crying out, "What must we do to be saved?" and afterwards witnessing, "By grace we are saved through faith."[52]

John Wesley was an evangelist long before Aldersgate but now the burden of self-effort is lifted. For years he had sought to lay his life on the altar but now, as it were, the fire of God's grace had brought new life and power and he became a fire-brand in the hand of God. The quest for holiness was still paramount but he had found the way to holiness, namely, saving faith in the merits of Christ. In this sense he is 'converted' and goes forth to strengthen his brethren. The impetus toward evangelism arises no longer out of his desire to serve and in this way to save his own soul as well, but flows from his gratitude for God's saving love in Jesus Christ:

> O how shall I the goodness tell,
> Father, which thou to me has showed?
> That I, a child of wrath and hell,
> I should be called a child of God,
> Should know, should feel, my sins forgiven,
> Blest with this antepast of heaven![53]

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[52] Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 468. See also Minutes of Conference, Conversation III, Tuesday, May 13, 1746. Question 4: "Wherin does our doctrine now differ from that we preached when at Oxford? Answer: Chiefly in these two points. (1) We then knew nothing of that righteousness of faith, in justification; nor (2) of the nature of faith itself, as implying consciousness of pardon."

[53] Wesley Hymn Book, p. 35, stanza 2.

From this time on Wesley was much more explicit concerning his destiny. It wasn't long before friend and foe were criticizing his itinerancy and advising him to take a parish, or to return to teaching. Because so many churches were closed to him because of his evangelical preaching Wesley had begun moving across parish boundaries. This was the major ground of the criticism. Wesley was transgressing the rule of the Church of England which limited the priest's office to the particular parish to which he had been appointed. Wesley, however, in his zeal for the gospel, is prepared to go to anyone who will hear and will not be restrained by a ruling of the church which he cannot find in Scripture. For him it amounted to whether he should obey God or man. His response to the criticism is so important for an understanding of how he saw his mission that it must be quoted in full:

> God in Scripture commands me according to my power, to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked, confirm the virtuous. Man forbids me to do this in another's parish: that is, in effect, to do it at all; seeing I have now no parish of my own, nor probably ever shall. Whom, then, shall I hear, God or man? 'If it be just to obey man rather than God, judge you. A dispensation of the gospel is committed to me; and woe is me if I preach not the gospel.' Suffer me to tell you my principles in this matter. I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far, I mean, that in whatever part of it am I judge it meet right and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work which I know God has called me to; and sure I am that his blessing attends it.[54]

The evangelist's mission field had moved beyond the walls of Oxford, away from far off Georgia to encompass the length and breadth of the British Isles. Nevertheless his mission is unaltered. He was and is still a servant of the gospel. It is the gospel and his belief

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[54] Letters, Vol. I, p. 285f.

that he is under orders to proclaim it far and wide that charge him with the urgency that was characteristic of his life. In some way his own salvation is tied up with his obedience, "I know God has committed to me a dispensation of the Gospel; yea and my own salvation depends upon preaching it."[55]

This is Wesley's dilemma. He has no desire to leave the Church of England. On the other hand he believes he has a divine commission to preach the gospel and has no intention of being disobedient to 'the heavenly vision'. He is not unaware of the risks; "but we cannot with a good conscience neglect the present opportunity of saving souls while we live, for fear of consequences which may possibly or probably happen after we are dead."[56] He will remain a priest in the Church of England but in obedience to the gospel he is forced to be disobedient to the discipline of the church.

It has already been pointed out that Wesley described Apostles and Evangelists as extraordinary officers in contrast to Pastors who were ordinary officers. It is significant that Wesley distinguishes between his own ordinary and extraordinary call. Writing to his brother Charles he explains:

> My ordinary call is my ordination by the Bishop; 'Take thou authority to preach the word of God'. My extraordinary call is witnessed by the works God doeth by my ministry, which prove that He is with me of a truth in this exercise of my office.[57]

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[55] Works, Vol. VI, p. 408.

[56] Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 281.

[57] Letters, Vol. I, p. 322. Elsewhere Wesley specifically claims that "being ordained as a Fellow of a College, I was not limited to any particular cure, but have an indeterminate commission to preach the word of God in any part of the Church of England." Journal, Vol. II, p. 257.

Wesley avoids the inference that the 'ordinary call' is of man whilst the 'extraordinary call' is of God by adding: "Perhaps this might be better expressed in another way: God bears witness in an extraordinary manner that my thus exercising my ordinary call is well-pleasing in His sight."[58] Wesley also believed that he and his helpers were 'extraordinary messengers':

> In what view may we and our helpers be considered? Perhaps as extraordinary messengers (that is, out of the ordinary way) designed (1) To provoke the regular ministers to jealousy. (2) To supply their lack of service toward those who are perishing for lack of knowledge. . .[59]

This is made even more explicit in a tract entitled, Preservative Against Unsettled Notions in Religion, which was published in 1758:

> We look upon ourselves, not as the Authors or Ringleaders of a particular sect or party; - but as Messengers of God, to those who are Christians in Name, but Heathens in heart and life, to call them back to that from which they are fallen, to real, genuine Christianity. We are therefore Debtors to all these, of whatever opinion or Denomination. And are consequently to do all that in us lies, to please all, for their good, to Edification.[60]

Wesley believed that in many parts of his own Church the gospel was not being preached; and therefore, he saw his responsibility in supplying this lack. But his concern was not merely with the members of his own Church. In his view his commission transcended all barriers, whether

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[58] Ibid., p. 323.

[59] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 309. It is possible that Wesley had in mind Romans 2:13-14: "For I speak to you Gentiles, as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify my office: if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh, and save some of them." Could it be that Wesley regarded the Church of England as the Israel of the eighteenth century and those outside of the Church to whom so much of his preaching was directed as the 'Gentiles'?

[60] P. 240. See Footnote Outler, p. 20. A copy of this tract (which is not in the Works) is in the North Room, Drew University Library.

they be parish lines drawn within his own Church, or denominational divisions, and extended even to those, possibly even, especially to those who were outside of any church. 'The world was his parish' in the widest sense.

It has been shown that Wesley's approach was evangelistic from at least the middle of 1725. Whilst it is indisputable that Aldersgate supplied a dynamic which up to that time had been singularly lacking, Skevington-Wood exaggerates when he states: "It was the warmed heart that made Wesley an evangelist."[61] Nehemiah Curnock, writing in the Preface to John Wesley's Journal reflects more accurately Wesley's own spirit. Commenting on the importance of Wesley's Diaries Curnock writes, "Above all, they enable students to picture more vividly the daily life of the man who even before his conversion was an enthusiastic evangelist."[62]

After 1738 Wesley's concern for the 'salvation of souls' was intensified and he travelled widely publishing abroad the 'astounding declaration' of God's redeeming grace in Jesus Christ. Of signal importance was his reluctant 'taking to the fields' in place of George Whitefield. It was on April 2, 1739, that Wesley 'consented to be more vile' by preaching in the open air in Bristol to about three thousand people.[63]

In Wesley's eyes the one thing needful was the salvation of

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[61] The Burning Heart, p. 74.

[62] Journal, Vol. I, Preface, p. x.

[63] Ibid., Vol. II, p. 167f. Field Preaching as one of the key means of evangelism employed by Wesley will be considered in more detail in Chapter V.

mankind, everything else was subservient to this aim. In his address before the Society for Reformation of Manners Wesley sees the original design of the Church of Christ as:

> A body of men compacted together, in order, first, to save each his own soul; then to assist each other in working out their salvation; and afterwards as far as in them lies, to save all men from present and future misery, to over turn the kingdom of Satan, and to set up the kingdom of Christ.[64]

This, of course, is an accurate description of the Societies which Wesley established all over the land. The purpose of the Methodist Societies was the saving of souls and the building up of the members in 'faith and fear'. But it did not stop there. That Wesley did not confine the task of evangelism to clergymen or even to that of his preachers we are left in no doubt:

> And this ought to be the continued care and endeavour of <u>every member of His Church</u>; otherwise he is not worthy to be called a member thereof, as he is not a living member of Christ.[65]

Wesley believed in what the Second Vatican Council described as the apostolate of the whole church. To be a Christian is to know the saving power of Christ and to be going on to perfection, and to be engaged in the task of 'saving all men from present and future misery'.

Even Church order must be assessed according to whether or not it hinders or assists the evangelistic task. When he was accused of doing "a great deal of harm by breaking and setting aside all ecclesiastical order"[66] Wesley inquires: "What is the end of all

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[64] <u>Works</u>, Vol. VI, p. 150.

[65] <u>Ibid</u>.

[66] <u>Letters</u>, Vol. II, p. 177.

ecclesiastical order? Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God, and to build them up in His fear and love?"[67] Wesley's point is clear. His mission was to make known the good news of God's love for all men. If order helped toward this end, well and good, but if not, it must be set aside. In Wesley's initial ministry among tinners, keelmen, and colliers order had no significance. Further, no amount of the 'most orderly preaching' in the churches was of any avail to drunkards, swearers, and harlots for the simple reason that they never went to church, "till, by what you term 'breach of order' they were brought to fear God and love Him, and keep His commandments."[68] Of first importance was that these people should be brought to a saving knowledge of God; where this is found, 'true order will not be wanting'. So far from disavowing order Wesley claims that the end result of his break with the traditional methods is the very order of which he is accused of destroying! And this order has come to places where it was never known before. "Order on its own, for its own sake is but a worthless shadow - but in conjunction with the knowledge and love of God it is of great price."[69] Elsewhere Wesley notes: "I would observe every punctilio of order, except where the salvation of souls is at stake. There I prefer the end before the means."[70]

In further correspondence on the subject of ecclesiastical order John Smith suggests:

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 146. To the chaplain to the Earl of Dartmouth.

> If one should look out of his grave in the middle of the next century, he would find the orderly preaching at St. Luke's and St. Giles's Church has done far more good than the disorderly preaching at Kennington.[71]

Wesley, with his characteristically sharp wit and with somewhat sweeping judgment, charges that the orderly preaching at the two churches mentioned has not resulted in converting one sinner to God "and if a man saves no souls while he is alive, I fear he will save few after he is dead."[72]

All ecclesiastical order must be at the service of the gospel. If order interferes with or does not assist the proclamation of the gospel then order must be set aside. By the same token Wesley is not concerned to argue about ceremonies and vestments. He is impatient with those Puritans who in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were preoccupied with matters of this kind. Wesley is far more concerned with the changing of 'men's tempers and lives' than he is with the reform of 'rites and ceremonies of the church'.[73]

The preaching of the church is to be judged by the same criterion. Preachers who are not converting souls to God are not only guilty of the sin of omission but they are a stumbling block in the path of those who have need of salvation. Insofar as they scatter rather than gather "a lifeless, unconverting minister is the murderer-general of his parish."[74] "Such a priest destroys more souls than any

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[71] Ibid., Vol. II, p. 95.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Works, Vol. VI, p. 263. In the end, however, he came to incorporate the Puritan critique of the Book of Common Prayer in his abbreviated revision of it in the Sunday service for Americans.

[74] Letters, Vol. I, pp. 95-96.

Deist in the kingdom."[75] Bearing in mind the havoc that Deism had wrought in the eighteenth century this is a very serious charge against some of his fellow clergy.

It is not surprising, therefore, to read Wesley's injunction to one of his preachers: "You have one business on earth - to save souls. Give yourself wholly to this."[76] Nor that 'soul-damning clergymen' give him more cause for concern than 'soul-saving laymen'.[77] In 1772 he reminded his brother Charles:

> Your business as well as mine is to save souls. When we took priest's orders, we undertook to make it our one business. I think every day lost which is not (mainly at least) employed in this thing. Sum totus in illo.[78]

The ultimate test of a preacher is by the fruit he gathers. Does his preaching bring sinners to repentance? Are souls saved from death?[79] For Wesley, these questions are more legitimate than 'Is he

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid., Vol. III, p. 148. Wesley is very careless in his use of language at this point and taken at its face value it appears as though man is responsible for and capable of 'saving souls'. But that this is not Wesley's position is very clear throughout his preaching and teaching. This matter will be taken up again in Chapter II so a single example will be given here. In his Explanatory Notes on the New Testament Wesley comments on I Corinthians 3:8: "Ministers are still barely instruments in God's hand, and depend as entirely as ever on His blessing, to give the increase to their labours. Without this, they are nothing; with it their part is so small, that they hardly deserve to be mentioned." p. 593.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid., Vol. V, p. 316. It is significant that Wesley links the 'one business' with the priest's orders bearing in mind that he was ordained in 1725, that is, thirteen years before Aldersgate. cf. Letters, Vol. II, p. 149. "Oh, he is ordained, and therefore has authority. Authority to do what? To save all the souls that will put themselves under his care."

[79] Standard Sermons, Vol. II, p. 9f. Sermon on the Mount XII.

ordained?' or 'Has he got a degree?'. Whilst he believed very strongly that education and training are desirable he does not think that this will automatically guarantee a successful ministry, that is, the saving of souls. Nor does he believe that without this training and education a man cannot have a successful ministry:

> I think he is a true, evangelical minister, διάκονος, servant of Christ and His Church, who οὕτω διακονεῖ, so ministers, as to save souls from death, to reclaim sinners from their sins; and that every Christian, if he is able to do it, has authority to save a dying soul. . . I am afraid, it will hold, on the other hand, with regard to the soul as well as the body, medicus non est qui non medetur; - I am afraid reasonable men will be much inclined to think he that saves no souls is no minister of Christ.[80]

Despite Wesley's deep interest in education even this must be subordinate to the 'saving of souls'. That education, even in a school, should not be an end in itself is made explicit in a letter Wesley wrote to one of his helpers who was in charge of one of the schools which was founded by the Methodists. He expresses dissatisfaction with the way the school was being run and concluded: "Make Christians, my dear Miss. Bishop, make Christians! Let this be your leading view."[81]

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[80] Letters, Vol. II, p. 149. This letter should be read with great care not only because it highlights Wesley's soteriological approach but also because it has obvious bearing on his doctrine of the ministry. cf. Explanatory Notes on the New Testament, p. 43. "'By their fruits ye shall know them'; A short, plain, easy rule, whereby to know true from false prophets; and one that may be applied by people of the meanest capacity, who are not accustomed to deep reasoning. True prophets convert sinners to God, or at least confirm and strengthen those that are converted. False prophets do not. They are also false prophets who, though speaking the very truth, yet are not sent by the Spirit of God, but come in their own name to declare it: their grand mark is, 'Not turning men from the power of Satan to God.'" For a treatment of Wesley's doctrine of the ministry see: Albert B. Lawson, John Wesley and the Christian Ministry, (London: S.P.C.K., 1963).

[81] Letters, Vol. VII, p. 63.

Toward the end of his long life, when the Methodists came very close to separating from the Church of England, the 'saving of souls' is still his chief concern. In 1785 he wrote to his brother Charles expressing this view: "I must and will save as many souls as I can while I live without being careful about what may possibly be when I die."[82]

From first to last Wesley was an evangelist. As a young student as well as a tutor at Oxford Wesley endeavoured to arrive at an understanding of the true nature of religion and to instruct his contemporaries in the Christian faith in order that they might be 'whole Christians'. As leader of the Holy Club he sought after holiness of life in order that he may glorify God as an agent of reconciliation in the world. His search after holiness was oriented toward evangelism. His twin motives in going to Georgia were to learn the true sense of the gospel in order that he may impart it to the heathen. In 1738 the love he sought so long is bestowed upon him as a free gift and his gratitude towards a gracious God supplies the dynamic which took him to the far corners of his country. Constrained by love his sole ambition was to proclaim the Evangel far and wide.

Everything is subservient to this aim. He sees the original design of the Church to be that of a group of men in community who are commissioned 'to save all men from present and future misery'. He maintains that the task of evangelism is not confined to preachers, ordained or lay but extends to the apostolate of the whole Church. Church discipline, Church order must be evaluated according to whether

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[82] Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 289.

or not they help or hinder the winning of men and women for Christ. The test of a true preacher is whether or not his preaching is changing lives. Education, religious or otherwise, must be geared toward 'making Christians'.

As a young man and to the end of his long life, Wesley was a servant of the Evangel.

But was Wesley an evangelist in the sense that he was more concerned with what may be termed a program of evangelism or was he concerned also with the content of the Evangel? Inasmuch as the Evangel is prior to evangelism, the task of evangelism correctly understood is also a theological task. But did Wesley understand it in this sense?

No interpreter of Wesley could justly describe him as a systematic theologian. Albert Outler has hit on the ingenious description of Wesley as a folk-theologian as distinct from a theologian's theologian:

> He was, by talent and intent, a folk-theologian: an eclectic who had mastered the secret of plastic synthesis, simple profundity, the common touch. He was an effective evangelist guided by a discriminating theological understanding, a creative theologian practically involved in the application of his doctrine in the renewal of the church.[83]

Outler's description is acceptable particularly when he describes Wesley as "an effective evangelist guided by a discriminating theological understanding." But, as McIntosh reminds us, Wesley was "a theologian for preachers."[84] And this task Wesley took with utmost seriousness. Wesley not only appreciated the importance of content he recognized fully that the Evangel is prior to evangelism. Or to express

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[83] Outler, op. cit., p. 119.

[84] The Nature and Design of Christianity in John Wesley's Early Theology, Ph.D. thesis by Lawrence D. McIntosh, Drew University, 1966, "Preface" p. iii.

it differently, the What of evangelism had priority for Wesley over the How of evangelism.

That this was so is clear from the manner in which Wesley set about his task. One has only to read his Standard Sermons to be made immediately aware of the theological thrust of his preaching. The major purpose underlying his publishing of the Christian Library was that his people, and especially his preachers should be informed concerning their faith. The first Methodist Conference held at Bristol in 1744 had as its agenda three questions:

> What to teach
> How to teach
> What to do; that is how
> to regulate our doctrine,
> discipline and practice.[85]

The two major doctrines, discussion on which took up almost the whole time of the Conference were Justification and Sanctification.[86] At the second Conference those present took up once again the topics of Justification and Sanctification.

In the introduction to his A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion Wesley continues his defense against those who objected to the form of his ministry. It is significant that he begins his defense with the content of his preaching and teaching.[87] For Wesley content

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[85] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 275.

[86] Ibid., p. 281.

[87] Ibid., p. 46. cf. Ibid., Vol. XIII, p. 258. "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or in America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit and discipline with which they first set out."

(Italics mine)

has priority and the form of his evangelism flows from the form of the gospel as he understands it. In other words, for Wesley, the Evangel informs his evangelism, and therefore it is essential to consider in some detail the substance of his theology.

PART II

THE CONTENT OF THE GOSPEL

CHAPTER II

THE GRACE OF GOD FOR FALLEN MAN

Although Wesley was not a systematic theologian in the tradition of an Aquinas or a Calvin, nevertheless he incessantly posed the theological question, not merely for himself, but also on behalf of his preachers, assistants, and the growing number of men and women who joined the Methodist Societies. Further, he was forced to defend his ministry against his many critics and he did so not on the grounds of expediency but on his understanding of the Evangel, as witnessed to by Scripture and the teaching of his church.

In several ways Wesley's theological method resembles that of St. Paul. Like the Apostle, a great deal of his time was spent in moving from one point to another forming new groups, or visiting and strengthening old ones. Like St. Paul Wesley's theology was formulated in the context of a loving, pastoral concern for his 'sons in the gospel' and the small groups of people which formed in many and varied places as a result of his itinerant ministry. In addition, again like St. Paul, Wesley's theology was often forged on the white hot anvil of controversy. It is not without significance that Wesley's theology is not to be found in a theological text book, but like that of St. Paul, in sermons and letters!

Wesley saw no need to sit down and write an Institutes of the Christian Religion or anything of that description. But he did

recognize that the proclamation of the gospel involved a theological task and this task he carried on throughout his life. He saw too, with unusual clarity, that theology is the servant of proclamation with the result that his theological writing in sermon, letter or treatise is never speculative but practical in aim and emphasis.

Because Wesley was not a systematic theologian it does not follow that his theology is without system or that it is invalid to set out his theology in some order. Inasmuch as for Wesley the form of the gospel carries with it the form of evangelism, it is imperative that this task be attempted here. In a later chapter it will be shown how Wesley's understanding of the gospel informed the means of evangelism which he employed. But here an attempt must be made to arrive at Wesley's thought concerning the content of the gospel.

A study of Wesley's theology will show that he concentrates on certain major emphases. He is concerned with the way of salvation and it is to this theme that he returns again and again. In other words, the evangelist had in mind the main design of God's deed, the shape of man's need, and the character of the new life into which God's deed summons man. The first two of these will be taken up in this chapter and the third, that is, the character of the new life, will be considered in the following chapter.

There can be no question as to the primary source of Wesley's theology. He constantly refers to the Bible as the whole and sole rule both of Christian faith and practice.[1] In the Preface to his Standard Sermons Wesley describes his intention in fervent prose:

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[1] Journal, Vol. II, p. 217 (1739); Works, Vol. XIII, p. 258 (1786).

> I want to know one thing - the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end He came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that Book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri.[2]

That Wesley was not literally a 'man of one book' is clear from the breadth of his own reading, his extensive publishing endeavours and his admonition to his preachers to read books other than the Bible or to return to their trade![3]

Wesley's method of interpretation of Scripture is clear from what follows:

> In His presence I open, I read His book; for this end, to find the way to heaven. Is there a doubt concerning the meaning of what I read? Does anything appear dark or intricate? I lift up my heart to the Father of Lights: 'Lord, is it not Thy word, "If any man lack wisdom, let Him ask of God", Thou "givest liberally, and upbraidest not." Thou hast said, "If any be willing to do Thy will, he shall know." I am willing to do, let me know, Thy will.' I then search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, 'comparing spiritual things with spiritual.' I meditate thereon with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable. If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God; and then the writings, whereby, being dead, they yet speak. And what I thus learn, that I teach.[4]

It is significant to note that Wesley does not lean merely on his own understanding of Scripture. That he allows Scripture to interpret Scripture is stated explicitly in a letter to Samuel Furly: "The general rule of interpreting Scripture is this, the literal sense of every text is to be taken, if it be not contrary to some other texts;

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[2] Standard Sermons, Vol. 1, Preface, pp. 31-32. cf. Works, Vol. VII, p. 203.

[3] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 315.

[4] Standard Sermons, Vol. 1, p. 32.

but in that case the obscure text is to be interpreted by those which speak more plainly."[5] Elsewhere he states explicitly that he and the members of the Holy Club read the Bible "as interpreted by the Primitive Church and our own. . ."[6]

Wesley was a man of his time and there is little doubt that he accepted the Bible as being verbally inspired. It should not be overlooked, however, that he was familiar with the work of such exegetes as John Heylyn, John Guyse and Philip Doddridge, and that he acknowledged his indebtedness to them.[7]

But it was to Johannes Albrecht Bengel, a pioneer in textual criticism, that Wesley owed most. It was upon Bengel's work that Wesley based his own Notes on the New Testament.[8] Wesley himself allows for

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[5] Letters, Vol. III, p. 129.

[6] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 348.

[7] Notes on the New Testament, p. 8, Preface. Heylyn was Rector of St. Mary-le-Strand which was consecrated in 1734. He was also a Prebendary of Westminister. He died in 1759. His Theological Lectures at Westminster Abbey, with an Interpretation of the Four Gospels was published in 1749. Guyse was a dissenting minister in London. He became the first pastor of the New Broad Street Chapel in 1727, and published A Practical Exposition of the Four Gospels in 1739. Doddridge (1702-1751) was a foremost dissenting minister and hymn writer. In 1729 he became pastor of a large Independent congregation at Northampton, and also Principal of the theological academy which he had attended earlier. His Family Expositor was published in 1745. Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament, to which we shall refer later in this chapter, is based on Matthew Henry's classic devotional commentary, Exposition of the Old and New Testaments. He was the son of the Puritan Philip Henry and became a Presbyterian minister at Chester in 1687.

[8] Ibid., p. 7. Bengel (1687-1752) entered the Lutheran ministry in 1707 and in 1713 became Professor at the seminary of Denkendorf. In 1741 he was appointed as General Superintendent in the Lutheran Church. His text and critical apparatus mark the beginning of the modern scientific method. His penetrating exegesis of the New Testament published in his Gnonom Novi Testamenti (1742) is equally significant.

possible corruption in the Greek text: "Neither will I affirm that the Greek copies from which this translation was made are always the most correct; and therefore I shall take the liberty, as occasion may require, to make here and there a small alteration."[9]

The Anglican Homilies were another important source of Wesley's theology, the significance of which cannot be over-stated. In tracing the early beginnings of Methodism in a sermon entitled, On God's Vineyard, Wesley recounts:

> The book which next to the Holy Scriptures, was of greatest use to them, in settling their judgement as to the grand point of justification by faith, was the book of Homilies. They were never clearly convinced that we are justified by faith alone, till they carefully consulted these, and compared them with the sacred writings, particularly St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. And no Minister of the Church can, with any decency, oppose these; seeing at his ordination he subscribed to them, in subscribing to the thirty-sixth Article of the Church.[10]

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[9] Ibid., p. 6.

[10] Works, Vol. VII, p. 204. The plan of issuing prescribed homilies for the use of disaffected and illiterate clergy was agreed to in the Convocation which met on January 20, 1542. A collection was duly produced twelve months later, but probably because Henry VIII refused to authorize it was not formally issued until early in Edward VI's reign, when it appeared with the authority of the Council on July 31, 1547. There were twelve in all, the majority of which were written by Thomas Cranmer. A 'Second Book' with 21 further homilies was issued under Elizabeth I. Most of these were written by John Jewel. In the eighteenth century all clergy of the Church of England had to subscribe to the 39 Articles of Religion two of which make specific reference to the Homilies. Article II refers to the Homily of Justification for a fuller account of 'the most wholesome doctrine' 'that we are justified by faith only'. Wesley does not refer very often to the 39 Articles of Religion. These were published in 1571 with royal ratification and the assent of Convocation. They are now found in the Book of Common Prayer. When the American societies formed themselves into an independent church, Wesley sent them an abridgment of the 39 Articles. He reduced them to twenty-four and to these the Conference added one, "Of the Rulers of the United States of America." cf. Henry Wheeler, History and Expesition of the Twenty-five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church, (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1908).

Wesley's counter charge against those in his own church who accused him of preaching a 'new gospel' was that they had for the greater part either forgotten or preferred to ignore the witness of Scripture and the teaching of their own church! Wesley's theology was thoroughly biblical and consistently supported by references to the Anglican Homilies.

What then was Wesley's understanding of the Gospel as it confronts man and calls him to decision? In other words, what was Wesley's understanding of God's act in Jesus Christ on behalf of man?[11] In one of his sermons Wesley offers a definition of the gospel:

> The gospel (that is, good tidings, good news for guilty, helpless sinners), in the largest sense of the word, means, the whole revelation made to me by Jesus Christ; and sometimes the whole account of what our Lord did and suffered while He tabernacled among men. The substance of all is, 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners'; or, 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, to the end we might not perish, but have everlasting life'; or, 'He was bruised for our transgressions, He was wounded for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed'.[12]

Wesley's definition says something about the nature of God, particularly in reference to His gracious movement toward man, the state

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[11] The field of our inquiry cannot be limited to the preaching of John Wesley. Certainly Wesley's sermons will be a major source of information but Wesley was a full-time evangelist in the sense that he never ceased being an evangelist when he left the pulpit. Wesley's proclamation of the gospel was not limited to his formal preaching. Everything he undertook was shot through with the spirit of the evangelist. When he wrote An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, (Works, Vol. VIII), Wesley's object was not merely polemical, nor even defensive, as much as it was evangelistic. He wanted his readers to hear the gospel! The same thing must be said about the bulk of his letter writing.

[12] The Way to the Kingdom, S. Vol. I, p. 159.

of man before God, and the manner of God's salvation in Jesus Christ. In other words, an attempt to arrive at the substance of the gospel in the theology and practice of John Wesley necessarily embraces his doctrine of God, his doctrine of man, and his doctrine of the Atonement.

The Grace of God

In his sermon "On the Trinity" Wesley indicates his firm belief in the reality of the Trinity although he did not insist on the use of either the word "Trinity" or "Person":

> I dare not insist on one's using the word Trinity or Person. I use them myself, without any scruple, because I know of none better, but if any man has any scruple concerning them, who shall constrain him to use them? . . . I would insist only on the direct words, unexplained, just as they lie in the text. 'There are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.'[13]

Wesley believed that God was at the same time three and one:

> But the manner how I do not comprehend; and I do not believe it. Now in this, in the manner, lies the mystery; and so it may; I have no concern with it: It is no object of my faith: I believe just so much as God has revealed, and no more.[14]

Wesley's point is that it is impossible for natural man to "discover" the nature of God. God has taken the initiative and has revealed Himself to man. It is not man's responsibility to believe anything other than that which God Himself has revealed. Whilst Wesley does list the attributes of God revealed in His word, he is always in a hurry to arrive at "the mercy of God," the "grace of God," the "love of God." From the Word we learn that "God is an eternal Being"; that God is "omnipresent, all-perfect, omnipotent and omniscient." Other

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[13] Works, Vol. VI, pp. 200-201. I John 5:8.

[14] Ibid., p. 204.

attributes of God which are revealed in His word are His "holiness," His "justice"; but above all His "mercy":

> This we may easily learn from that beautiful passage in the thirty-third and fourth chapters of Exodus: 'And Moses said, I beseech thee, show me thy glory. And the Lord descended in the cloud, and proclaimed the name of the Lord, . . .The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, and forgiving iniquity and transgressions and sin.'[15]

In another sermon Wesley lists a similar catalogue of attributes and moves to a climax in much the same way as we have indicated above: "And, above all, His love, which is the very brightness of His glory."[16] Commenting on I John 4:8 ('He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.'), Wesley writes:

> This little sentence brought St. John more sweetness, even in the time he was writing it, than the whole world can bring. God is often styled holy, righteous, wise, but not holiness, righteousness or wisdom in the abstract, as He is said to be love: intimating that this is His darling, His reigning attribute, the attribute that sheds an amiable glory on all His other perfections.[17]

The Grace of God in Creation

John Deschner in considering Christ's non-mediatorial work in creation and providence writes: "God's gracious decree to make a holy creation dominates Christ's work in creation, providence and redemption.

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[15] The Unity of the Divine Being, Works, Vol. VII, pp. 265-266.

[16] Sermon on the Mount, VI, S, Vol. I, pp. 435-436.

[17] Notes on the New Testament. Wesley's emphasis on "the love of God" as the reigning attribute is most clearly seen in his controversy with the Calvinists and with his understanding of "holiness" as "faith working by love." In Chapter III of Part II we will consider Wesley's teaching on holiness. In a later chapter (Part III, Chapter IV, The Urgency of the Evangel) we shall treat the Calvinist controversy in some detail.

One grace underlines all three."[18]

It is the Wesleyan emphasis on the graciousness of God's activity as creator that we wish to underline. In his note on Rev. 4:11 Wesley writes:

> Creation is the ground of all the works of God: therefore, for this, as well as for His other works, will He be praised to all eternity. . . . It is to the free, gracious, and powerfully working will of Him who cannot possibly need anything that all things owe their first existence.[19]

One of the reasons why man should not hesitate to ask God for a blessing is that as our Father, He is our Creator:

> . . . the Author of our being; He who raised us from the dust of the earth; who breathed into us the breath of life, and we became living souls. But if He made us, let us ask, and He will not withhold any good thing from the work of His own hands.[20]

In the introduction to the sermon which he preached less than three weeks after the Aldersgate experience Wesley emphasizes the central role of grace in the creation of man: "It was free grace that 'formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into him a living soul' and stamped on that soul the image of God, and 'put all things under his feet.'"[21]

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[18] John Deschner, Wesley's Christology, (Dallas: Southern Methodist Press, 1960), p. 72.

[19] Notes on the New Testament, cf. "On Divine Providence," Works, Vol. VI, p. 315. "The eternal almighty, all-wise, all-gracious God is the Creator of heaven and earth."

[20] Sermon on the Mount, VI, S, Vol. I, p. 433.

[21] Salvation by Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 37.

The Grace of God in Providence

The notion of Providence is prominent in Wesley's doctrine of God. The God who by His grace created the world of things and the world of men is no absentee landlord. In strong opposition to the prevailing deistic conception of God, Wesley declares that the same grace that was present in creation continues with man throughout his life. "For there is nothing we are, or have, or do, which can deserve the least thing at God's hand."[22] Wesley refers to the works of providence as "one of the first principles of religion"[23] and in a letter to "John Smith" he writes:

> I believe firmly, and that in the most literal sense that, 'without God we can do nothing'; that we cannot think, or speak, or move a hand or an eye without the concurrence of the divine energy; and that all our natural faculties are God's gifts, nor can the meanest be exerted without the assistance of His spirit.[24]

God's providential care is over all men:

> There is a three-fold circle of divine providence. The outermost circle includes all the sons of men . . . the inner circle encompasses the whole visible Christian Church. He has an additional regard to these, and a nearer attention to their welfare. But the innermost circle of his providence encloses only the invisible church of Christ; all real Christians. . . .[25]

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[22] Ibid.

[23] The Imperfection of Human Knowledge, Works, Vol. VI, pp. 343-344.

[24] Letters, Vol. II, p. 71. cf. A Thought on Necessity, Works, Vol. X, pp. 476-477. We noticed above that Wesley encourages us to pray to the Father because as our Creator He will not withhold anything from us. A further reason for encouragement is that He is also our Preserver: "Who, day by day, sustains the life he has given; of whose continuing love we now and every moment receive life, and breath, and all things." Works, Vol. VI, p. 433.

[25] Spiritual Worship, Works, Vol. VI, pp. 428-429. Deschner shows how this teaching is found also in Wesley's Notes on the New Testament. cf. Mt. 5:45, Rom. 8:39, and I Tim. 4:10.

This passage suggests three important conclusions. Firstly, there is a direct relation between divine providence to the offer of salvation for all men. That this is so can be concluded from Wesley's teaching that God's providential care of His Son is a "special instance of particular providence."[26] It follows that God's special providence for the "innermost circle" includes God's act in Jesus Christ which Wesley maintains was for all men. Secondly, the primary aim of God's providential care for all men is that they might be moved toward the innermost circle of His care. Thirdly, Wesley's teaching on providence implies that man should not rest content in the innermost circle but should be engaged in God's loving purpose toward those on the outside.[27]

In other words, in Wesley's teaching of God's grace in providence there occurs the strong note of God's offer of salvation for all men. Here too, is found Wesley's conviction that God's purpose for men is that they should be holy and that holiness is more than an end in itself but summons and enables that man in "the innermost circle" to participate in God's redemption for all men. Holiness is oriented toward evangelism.[28]

God's Activity as Judge

Wesley's teaching on the grace of God in creation and providence did not lead him to the concept of God as a benevolent Being who turns

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[26] Notes on the New Testament, p. 216; Luke 4:17; p. 353, John 11:9-10.

[27] A qualifying note must be sounded here. Insofar as Wesley held that the Christian life is not a state but a dynamic relationship, and that the Church lives out of the Word of God, all men are "outsiders."

[28] See Chapter I and also Chapter III for a more detailed treatment of this important conclusion.

a blind eye to man's rejection of His grace. The Wesleyan God is not only Creator and Preserver, He is also the Judge of all men. Man incurs God's judgment by his disobedience.[29] Sin is not merely the breaking of the law, it is an offense against God Himself. An offense which evokes the wrath of God. Against William Law, Wesley is adament that the wrath of God is a reality. Law maintains: 1) There is no vindictive, avenging, or punitive justice in God; 2) There is no wrath or anger in God; 3) God inflicts no punishment on any creature, neither in this world nor that to come. Wesley attempts to disprove all three statements with numerous quotations from scripture. Whether or not Wesley succeeds is for our purpose beside the point; one thing is clear, he takes very seriously the judgment of God.[30] There are a number of passages in the Notes which echo this teaching.[31] Elsewhere Wesley writes:

> Do you not take the name of God in vain? Do you remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy? Do you not speak evil of the ruler of your people? Are you not a drunkard, or a glutton, faring as sumptuously as you can every day; making a god of your belly? Do you not avenge yourself? Are you not a whoremonger or adulterer? Answer plainly to your own heart, before God the Judge of all.[32]

Because of his sin man is condemned to death. The sentence is pronounced, only the action of the accuser can stay the execution. But nothing is more certain for Wesley than that God has acted for man in His Son Jesus Christ!

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[29] See next section for a treatment of Wesley's doctrine of man.

[30] Letters, Vol. III, pp. 345-350.

[31] Rev. 4:11; Acts 2:19.

[32] An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 15f.

God's Grace in Redemption

> A correlative to the wrath of God is the love of God. Behold then both the justice and mercy of God! . . . His justice in punishing sin . . . and His mercy, in providing an universal remedy for an universal evil; . . .[33]

The same grace that was at work in the natural order of creation and preservation is at work in God's love for fallen man. As our Father God created us, as our Father He preserves us:

> Above all, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and of all that believe in Him; who justifies us 'freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus'; who hath 'blotted out all our sins, and healed all our infirmities'; who has received us for His own children, by adoption and grace, and 'because' we 'are sons hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into' our 'hearts, crying, Abba, Father'; who 'hath begotten us again of incorruptible seed' and 'created us anew in Christ Jesus'. Therefore we know that He heareth us always; therefore we pray to Him without ceasing. We pray, because we love; and 'we love Him, because He first loved us'.[34]

It is God who is at work for the salvation of man. It was He who "sent" His Son and the suffering of Christ was an act of God:

> 'He began to be sorrowful and in deep anguish' - Probably from feeling the arrows of the Almighty stick fast in His soul, while God 'laid on Him the iniquities of us all' who can tell what painful and dreadful sensations were then impressed on Him by the immediate hand of God?[35]

On the other hand, God also watches over His Son so that His sufferings are limited to God's intention: "So far could they go, but no farther."[36]

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[33] On the Fall of Man, Works, Vol. VI, p. 224. cf. S, Vol. I, p. 143.

[34] Sermon on the Mount, VI, S, Vol. I, p. 433.

[35] Notes, Mt. 26:37. cf. Acts 2:23. Wesley believes that God could have stopped the crucifixion of Christ, but His love for the world prevented Him from exerting this power.

[36] Ibid., Act. 13:29.

To put it in another way, "the activity of the whole Trinity is involved in the work of redemption."[37] The whole Godhead, but more eminently, God the Father "was in Christ, reconciling the world."[38]

The first conclusion which can be drawn concerning the content of the Evangel for Wesley is that he makes no attempt to formulate a speculative doctrine of God. He is overwhelmed by the miracle of God's grace which extravagantly embraces all men. Therefore, he is consistently concerned to make this known and almost all his discussion on the doctrine of God is oriented toward this end.

Wesley is not interested in merely "acknowledging His being."[39] His aim is that men should "know God", that they should be "acquainted with God."[40] But he was aware that natural man cannot achieve this existential knowledge, and that he is totally dependent upon God's revelation of Himself. The initiative is always with God.

The primacy of love in the Godhead is demonstrated by God's grace in His creation, preservation of the natural order and His redemption of the world. God's design for His creation has been thwarted by man's disobedience. In His mercy God seeks to restore His original design, to establish once more His purposes for man. His summons to man, therefore, is essentially, 'be who you are intended to be'.

In one of his finest hymns, Come, O Thou Traveller Unknown,[41]

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[37] Ibid., Heb. 9:14.

[38] Ibid., II Cor. 5:19.

[39] Original Sin, Works, Vol. VI, p. 58.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Wesley Hymn Book, p. 28.

Charles Wesley expresses in poetic form the heart of the Wesleyan doctrine of God. There are twelve stanzas, the last six of which conclude with the same line: "Thy nature and Thy name is Love." The seventh stanza is as follows:

> 'Tis Love! tis Love! Thou diedst for me!
> I hear Thy whisper in my heart;
> The morning breaks, the shadows flee,
> Pure, universal Love Thou art;
> To me, to all, Thy mercies move;
> Thy nature and Thy name is Love.[42]

The Human Predicament

Before we consider in greater detail God's act of redemption in Jesus Christ, it is necessary to take a closer look at Wesley's understanding of the object of God's grace, that is, fallen man. That God sent His Son into the world is "good news"; that He sent His Son "to save sinners" is "good news" indeed!

Status Integritatis

Following the Genesis account of the creation Wesley taught that man was made in the image of God. He sees the image as threefold, but considers the Moral Image to be of more significance than the other two:

> . . . not barely in his natural image, a picture of His own immortality; a spiritual being, endued with understanding, freedom of will, and various affections; nor merely in his political image, the governor of this lower world, having 'dominion over the fishes of the sea, and over all the earth': but chiefly in his moral image; which

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[42] Ibid.

> according to the Apostle, is 'righteousness and true holiness' (Eph. 4:24).[43]

That Wesley had a very exalted view of man in his original state is clear from what follows:

> 'God is love'; accordingly, man at his creation was full of love; . . . God is full of justice, mercy and truth; so was man as he came from the hands of his Creator. God is spotless purity; and so man was in the beginning pure from every sinful blot. . . .[44]

To this "perfect man," God gave His perfect law, to which man was to give "full and perfect obedience."[45] Insofar as man was made in the "image of God" he was fully capable of obeying the law and thus "no allowance was made for any falling short."[46] To this moral law, engraved on man's heart "by the finger of God":[47]

> . . . it seemed good to the sovereign wisdom of God to superadd one positive law: 'Thou shalt not eat of the fruit of the tree that groweth in the midst of the garden. . . .[48]

Whilst man could not sin directly against the "law of love," written upon his heart, he was not immutable and possessed a power to sin (posse peccare) against the "positive law" and the Fall took place

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[43] The New Birth, S, Vol. II, pp. 227-228. cf. John Wesley, Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament, (Bristol: William Pine, 1765), Vol. I, p. 7. Wesley's Notes Upon the Old Testament is in three volumes and is based, as was noted earlier, on Matthew Henry's Exposition on the Old and New Testaments. Wesley's view of the threefold image closely follows that of Matthew Henry. See also The End of Christ's Coming, Works, Vol. VI, p. 269.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Justification by Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 116f.

[46] Ibid.

[47] The Original Nature, Property, and Use of the Law, S, Vol. II, p. 43.

[48] Justification by Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 116.

when man disobeyed this law.[49]

Status Corruptionis

The Fall

Although Adam is held responsible for this "wilful act of disobedience to his creator"[50] Wesley attributes the origin of evil to the devil who deliberately brought about the fall of man. It was "Lucifer, son of the morning" who tempted Eve. Eve succumbed readily and in turn led Adam into disobedience.[51] The beginning of Eve's sin was unbelief, "she gave more credit to the word of the devil, than to the word of God"[52] and "unbelief brought forth actual sin."[53] But Adam ". . . sinned with his eyes open. He rebelled against His creator, . . . by loving the creature more than the creator."[54]

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[49] On the Fall of Man, Works, Vol. VI, p. 215. "To crown all the rest, he was endued with liberty; a power of directing his own affections and actions; a capacity of determining himself, or of choosing good and or evil."

[50] The New Birth, S, Vol. II, p. 229.

[51] The End of Christ's Coming, Works, Vol. VI, p. 271f. Thus Wesley answers the charge that "God is responsible for evil" in two ways. 1. Adam did not have to sin; he was able to sin and he did. 2. "Unde Malum? From 'Lucifer, son of the morning.'" On a more positive note Wesley declares that ". . . (God) saw that to permit the fall of the first man was far best for man-kind in general; that abundantly more good than evil would accrue to the posterity of Adam by his fall; . . . If Adam had not fallen, Christ had not died. . . ." God's Love to Fallen Man, Works, Vol. VI, p. 231f. cf. Harald Lindstrom, Wesley and Sanctification, (London: Epworth Press, 1950), p. 31. "Wesley's attitude to original sin reveals a marked soteriological element in his theology and emphasizes the idea of grace."

[52] The Fall of Man, Works, Vol. VI, p. 217f.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

The consequences of the Fall are far-reaching:

> For the moment he tasted that fruit, he died. His soul died, was separated from God. . . . His body, likewise, became corruptible and mortal; so that death then took hold on this also. And being already dead in spirit, dead to God, dead in sin, hastened on to death everlasting, . . .[55]

Wesley describes this spiritual and bodily death as the loss of the image. "He lost the whole moral image of God - righteousness and true holiness."[56] Not only did Adam lose the moral image but "in the room of this, he had sunk into pride and self-will, the very image of the devil; and into sensual appetites and desires, the image of the beasts that perish."[57]

Elsewhere Wesley states that "the barrier between man and brutes is that man is capable of God. . . ."[58] In other words, to be in the image of God is to be capable of knowing, loving and obeying the Creator, and in this capacity lies our true manhood. But at the Fall man lost the image of God and therefore his capacity for God, and consequently the true essence of his manhood. In place of which man is demonic and sub-human. It is impossible to describe the consequences of the Fall in stronger terms than these.[59] Wesley is so anxious to

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[55] Justification by Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 117.

[56] The End of Christ's Coming, Works, Vol. VI, p. 272. cf. The Fall of Man, Works, Vol. VI, p. 223, ". . . he lost the moral image of God, and, in part, the natural. He commenced unholy, foolish, and unhappy."

[57] The New Birth, S, Vol. II, p. 230.

[58] The General Deliverance, Works, Vol. VI, p. 243.

[59] Wesley taught that "the whole of creation suffered because of the Fall," cf. The Doctrine of Original Sin, Works, Vol. IX, p. 319. "When man, the lord of the visible creation, rebelled against God, every part of the creation began to suffer on account of his sin."

emphasize man's depravity and God's grace that at times man appears to be beyond redemption!

Original Sin[60]

Wesley regarded belief in Original Sin as "the first grand distinguishing point between Heathenism and Christianity"[61] so that all who deny its validity "are but heathens still."[62] That the human predicament is in a large measure due to the Fall is an ever recurring theme throughout Wesley's preaching and writing:

> This, therefore is the general ground of the whole doctrine of justification. By the sin of the first Adam, who was not only the father, but likewise the representative, of us all, we all fell short of the favour of God; we all became children of wrath; or as the Apostle expresses it, 'judgement came upon all men to condemnation.'[63]

Original Sin is also the foundation of the New Birth:

> And in Adam all died, all human kind, all the children of men who were then in Adam's loins. The natural consequence of this is, that every one descended from him comes into the world spiritually dead, dead to God, wholly dead in sin; entirely void of the life of God; void of the image of God, of all that righteousness and holiness wherein Adam was created. . . . This, then, is the foundation of the new birth, - the entire corruption of our nature. . . .[64]

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[60]Wesley's major work on this topic was written in 1756 as a refutation of John Taylor's The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin, Works, Vol. IX, p. 191ff. John Taylor was a distinguished dissenting divine who wrote The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin in 1740 against a Calvinist anthropology. He was an early Unitarian. Wesley describes Taylor's work as "old Deism in a new dress; seeing it saps the very foundation of all revealed religion, whether Jewish or Christian." (Preface, p. 194)

[61]Original Sin, S. Vol. II, p. 222.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Justification by Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 119.

[64]The New Birth, S, Vol. II, p. 230. cf. Works, Vol. VI, p. 223.

In his essay on Original Sin Wesley reveals a Christological basis for his acceptance of Adam as federal head or representative of mankind:

> My reason for believing he was so, (i.e. the federal head) in some sense, is this; Christ was the representative of mankind, when God 'laid on Him the iniquities of us all, and he was wounded for our transgressions.' But Adam was a type or figure of Christ, therefore he was also in some sense, our representative; in consequence of which, 'all died' in him, as 'in Christ all shall be made alive.'[65]

What exactly did Wesley mean by Adam being the "federal head or representative of mankind"? "The thing I mean is this: The state of all man-kind did so far depend on Adam, that, by his fall, they all fell into sorrow, and pain, and death, spiritual and temporal."[66]

In 1744 the question was posed in this fashion:

> Q.15. In what sense is Adam's sin imputed to all mankind?
>
> A. In Adam all die; that is (1) Our bodies then became mortal (2) Our souls died; that is, were disunited from God. And hence, (3) we are all born with a

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[65] Works, Vol. IX, p. 332. Colin Williams rightly points out that although Wesley does give "a lengthy analysis of all sorts of conditions of men from many ages and races, to suggest the truth of the Biblical account" he does not "attempt to prove the doctrine by this analysis"; rather, ". . . this account of the present state of man is confirmed by daily experience. It is true, the natural man discerns it not: and this is not to be wondered at. So long as a man born blind continues so, he is scarce sensible of his want: much less, could we suppose a place where all were born without sight, would they be sensible of the want of it. In like manner, so long as men remain in their natural blindness of understanding, they are not sensible of their spiritual wants, and of this in particular. But as soon as God opens the eyes of their understanding, they see the state they were in before; they are then deeply convinced, that 'every man living,' themselves especially, are, by nature, 'altogether vanity,' that is, folly and ignorance, sin and wickedness.'" (Original Sin, S, Vol. II, p. 215, quoted by Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today, pp. 51-52.).

[66] Works, Vol. IX, p. 332.

> sinful devilish nature. By reason whereof, (4) We are children of wrath, liable to death eternal (Rom. 5: 18; Eph. 2:3).[67]

Wesley is in agreement with the orthodox teaching that because Adam is the representative of mankind all men share in his trespass and the guilt which the trespass incurs is imputed to all. "I undertake to prove that . . . God . . . imputes Adam's first sin to all mankind. . . ."[68] and ". . . to impute sin is either to impute sin itself, or guilt on the account of it."[69] Commenting on Eph. 2:3, Wesley argues:

> He expressly says, 'We were children of wrath even as others, by nature', or from our birth. He does not say We became so by education, or by imitation, or by custom in sinning; but to show us when it is that we commence sinners, by what means we become 'children of wrath', whence it is that we are so prone to evil from our infancy and to imitate bad rather than good examples, he says, 'We are children of wrath by nature;' we were born fallen creatures; we came into the world sinners, and such, liable to wrath, in consequence of the fall of our first father.[70]

In the Treatise on Baptism (1756) adapted from the treatise written by his father, Wesley accepts the orthodox view:

> That we are all born under the guilt of Adam's sin, and that all sin deserves eternal misery, was the unanimous sense of the ancient Church, as it is expressed in the Ninth Article of our own.[71]

However, there is another strand of thought in Wesley's theology

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[67] Minutes of Conference, June 25, 1744, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 277.

[68] Original Sin, Works, Vol. IX, p. 409.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., p. 419.

[71] Works, Vol. X, p. 190. cf. Works, Vol. IX, pp. 313,316.

which qualifies his teaching on the guilt of Original Sin. On the one hand Wesley believes that the atonement of Christ absolves all men from the guilt of Original Sin:

> That text, 'As by one man's disobedience, all men were made sinners, so by the obedience of One, all were made righteous,' we conceive means, By the merits of Christ, all men are cleared from the guilt of Adam's actual sin.[72]

In 1776 Wesley puts it even more strongly:

> Therefore no infant ever was or ever will be 'sent to hell for the guilt of Adam's sin,' seeing it is cancelled by the righteousness of Christ as soon as they are sent into the world.[73]

On the other hand, a further qualification to his teaching on the guilt of Original Sin is his emphasis on man's guilt <u>incurred by his own sin</u>. The poor in spirit is one whose ". . . guilt is now also before his face."[74]

> . . . he knows the punishment he has deserved, were it only on account of his carnal mind, the entire, universal corruption of his nature: <u>how much more</u>, on account of all his evil desires or thoughts, of all his sinful words and actions! He cannot doubt for a moment, but the least of these deserves the damnation of hell.[75]

The greatest cause of guilt is not involvement in the trespass of Adam but "not believing on the name of the only-begotten Son of God."[76] In the final analysis man is not answerable for any sin except

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[72] <u>Minutes of Conference</u>, June 25, 1744, <u>Works</u>, Vol. VIII, p. 277.

[73] <u>Letters</u>, Vol. VI, p. 239. In the <u>Treatise on Baptism</u> which he took over from Samuel Wesley, Wesley accepts that Original Sin is cancelled only at Baptism. Nowhere does he attempt to reconcile this teaching with that quoted above. <u>Works</u>, Vol. X, p. 190f.

[74] <u>Sermon on the Mount, I</u>, S, Vol. I, p. 324.

[75] <u>Ibid</u>.

[76] <u>Sermon on the Mount, XIII</u>, S, Vol. I, p. 324.

his own: "I believe none ever did, or ever will, die eternally, merely for the sin of our first father."[77] Because of the possibility of recovery through the Second Adam, no one will finally lose by the Fall "unless by his own choice."[78]

Thus far we have concentrated on Wesley's understanding of sin as guilt. This understanding of sin corresponds to his doctrine of justification. But Wesley also gave prominence in his preaching and teaching to sin understood as depravity, an understanding which resulted in his doctrine of sanctification. Man is not only guilty because of his disobedience but he is also depraved or corrupted by the loss of the Moral Image or original righteousness:

> Know thyself to be a sinner, and what manner of sinner thou art. Know that corruption of thy inmost nature, whereby thou art very far gone from original righteousness, whereby 'the flesh lusteth' always 'contrary to the Spirit' through that 'carnal mind' which 'is enmity against God' which 'is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be'. Know that thou art corrupted in every power, in every faculty of thy soul; that thou art totally corrupted in every one of these, all the foundations being out of course. The eyes of thine understanding are darkened, . . . Thy will is no longer the will of God. . . . Thy affections are alienated from God. . . so that there is no soundness in thy soul; but 'from the crown of the head, to the sole of the foot' . . . there are only 'wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores.'[79]

This corruption is likened to "an evil root" which sends out

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[77] Works, Vol. IX, p. 315.

[78] Ibid., p. 332. cf. Predestination Calmly Considered, Works, Vol. X, p. 223. Wesley's individualism at this point is in line with his Arminian view of election: "He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not is damned." In rejecting the Calvinist doctrine of reprobation Wesley must also reject the notion that man is condemned solely on the ground of Original Sin. cf. Lindstrom, Sanctification in Wesley, p. 36f.

[79] The Way to the Kingdom, S, Vol. I, pp. 155-156.

branches of "unbelief, independence and pride."[80] Or it is likened to "an evil fountain from which flows the bitter stream of vanity, thirst of praise, ambition, covetousness, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life."[81] The stream becomes a river full of "anger, hatred, malice, revenge, envy, jealousy and evil surmisings."[82]

This same note is sounded over and over again in Wesley's sermons: "Only corrupt fruit grows on a corrupt tree. And man's heart is altogether corrupt and abominable."[83] "Natural man is a servant of sin."[84] "The Apostle Paul shows that men are helpless as well as guilty."[85] In his sermon The General Spread of the Gospel Wesley paints a very gloomy picture of "the present state of mankind."[86] At other times Wesley describes man's corruption as a fatal disease:

> The poor in spirit is one who has a deep sense of the loathsome leprosy of sin, which he brought with him from his mother's womb, which overspreads his whole soul, and totally corrupts every power and faculty thereof.[87]

In an even more graphic and macabre description he declares: "Our debts are . . . diseases that drink up our blood and spirits, that bring us down to the chambers of the grave."[88] Whilst in his sermon on

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[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Salvation by Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 38.

[84] The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption, S, Vol. I, p. 185.

[85] Sermon on the Mount, I, S, Vol. I, p. 327.

[86] Works, Vol. VI, pp. 277-279.

[87] Sermon on the Mount, I, S, Vol. I, p. 323.

[88] Sermon on the Mount, VI, S, Vol. I, p. 442.

Original Sin Wesley describes man's fatal disease as "the love of the world"; the symptoms of which are "the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eye, and the desire of praise."[89] Therefore:

> . . . the proper nature of religion, the religion of Jesus Christ . . . is θεραπεία ψυχῆς God's method of healing a soul which is thus diseased. Hereby the great physician of souls applies medicines to heal this sickness; to restore human nature, totally corrupted in all its faculties.[90]

In his note on Matthew 11:28, Wesley brings his understanding of sin as guilt and as corruption together:

> 'Ye that labour' - after rest in God. 'And are heavy laden' - with the guilt and power of sin. 'And I will give you rest' - I alone (for none else can) will freely give you (what ye cannot purchase) rest from the guilt of sin by justification, and from the power of sin by sanctification.[91]

We are now in a position to summarize Wesley's judgment concerning the human predicament:

1. In that Adam is the representative of mankind, all men share in his sin and guilt.
2. Although no man shall be finally judged except for his own sin, every man is his own Adam.
3. Therefore man is adjudged guilty before the holy God and is deserving only of death.
4. Because man is totally corrupt he is powerless in the face of his predicament.
5. Man's plight is accentuated by the fact that he is oblivious of his danger.

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[89] Original Sin, S, Vol. II, p. 219f.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Notes on the New Testament. cf. S, Vol. I, pp. 324-325.

This last point deserves some amplification. Wesley believed that until man was made aware of his disease he could not know the cure.

Wesley's aim, therefore, is to proclaim to all men their need of salvation because until they acknowledge their need man cannot "truly believe in Christ":

> The power of godliness consists in the love of God and man; this is heavenly and substantial religion. But no man can possibly 'love his neighbour as himself' until he loves God; and no man can possibly love God, till he truly believes in Christ; and no man truly believes in Christ, till he is deeply convinced of his own sinfulness, guiltiness, and helplessness. But this no man ever was, neither can be, who does not know he has a corrupt nature.[92]

In Wesley's view man is blind and:

> So long as men remain in their natural blindness of understanding, they are not sensible of their spiritual wants. . . . But as soon as God opens the eyes of their understanding, they see the state they were in before. . . .[93]

Man must hear the Word of condemnation that he may hear the Word of reprieve. By the grace of God man must be made aware that he is in the sleep of death, that he is a debtor in prison awaiting execution, that he is dying of a virulent disease, in order that, God God can awaken him, forgive his debts, free him from prison and heal his disease. It is Wesley's contention that both the knowledge of his predicament and the way of escape is provided by God's act in Jesus Christ.

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[92] Works, Vol. IX, p. 313. cf. p. 306.

[93] S, Vol. I, p. 215.

The Work of Christ in Redemption[94]

When we turn to a consideration of Wesley's understanding of God's act of redemption in Jesus Christ we are at once reminded of Melanchthon's oft quoted dictum: "To know Christ is to know His benefits."[95] Wesley was more interested in the Work of Christ than he was in the Person of Christ.[96] However, he leaves us in no doubt as to his strong belief in the divinity of the man Jesus:

> I believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Saviour of the world, the Messiah so long foretold; that, being anointed with the Holy Ghost, He was a Prophet, revealing to us the whole will of God; that he was a Priest, who gave Himself a sacrifice for sin, and still makes intercession for transgressors; that He is King, who has all power in heaven and in earth, and will reign till He has subdued all things to Himself. I believe He is the proper, natural Son of God, God of God, very God of very God; and that He is the Lord of all, having absolute, supreme, universal dominion over all things; but more peculiarly our Lord, who believe in Him, both by conquest, purchase, and voluntary obligation.[97]

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[94]Christ's non-mediatoral work in Creation and Providence is treated by John Deschner in his study, Wesley's Christology, where he writes: "The heavy emphasis on Christ's role in both creation and providence may be taken as an indication of the underlying doctrine of Grace." p. 65.

[95]Charles Leander Hill, The Loci Communes of Philip Melanchthon, (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1944), p. 68. "I do not see how I can call that man a Christian who is ignorant of the remaining topics such as the power of sin, the law and grace. For by them is Christ properly known, if indeed this is to know Christ, to wit, to know His benefits and not as they teach, to perceive his nature and mode of his incarnation."

[96]We support Deschner's thesis that although Wesley's Christology is essentially a matter of "the pre-supposed Christ" his Christology "really is the presupposition, not the appendix of his theology." Wesley's Christology, Introduction, p. 3f.

[97]Letters, Vol. III, pp. 8-9. cf. S, Vol. II, pp. 426-428; Journal, Vol. V, pp. 253-254. Wesley rarely refers to the Incarnation or to the Virgin Birth. It appears that he had little interest in the historical Jesus and is more concerned with what God has done through

Although Wesley never devoted an entire tract or even an entire sermon to the doctrine of the Atonement, contemporary Wesleyan scholars are agreed that the Atonement if of vital importance for him: ". . . it was undoubtedly a pivotal and essential theme in both his preaching and his thought."[98] Albert Outler writes of:

> A complex doctrine of Atonement, which emphasizes the Total Event of Jesus Christ as the atoning 'act' by which the power of evil is broken and men are reconciled to God. Methodism has embraced both the patristic notions of lutron (what Aulen calls 'the dramatic theory of the atonement') and the Abelardian notion of Jesus Christ as the exemplar of God's sacrifical love as one of the 'salient theological motifs' of the Methodist Heritage.[99]

This interpretation of Wesley can be readily documented from Wesley's own writings. For example, Wesley's well-known willingness "to think and let think" did not include the Atonement:

> But I do not know how any one can be a Christian believer till he 'hath' as St. John speaks, 'the witness in himself'; till 'the Spirit of God witnesses with his spirit, that he is a child of God'; that is, in effect, till God the Holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him <u>through the merits of God the Son</u>; . . . .[100]

Christ for man and what He can do in man. But it is clear that he believed in the two natures in one person and in the Virgin Birth. In the same letter to a <u>Roman Catholic</u> he continues: "I believe that He was made man, joining the human nature with the divine in one person; being conceived by the singular operation of the Holy Ghost, and born of the blessed Virgin Mary, who, as well after as before she brought Him forth, continued a pure and unspotted virgin." <u>Letters</u>, Vol. III, p. 9. In contrast to John Wesley's apparent disinterest in the Incarnation, Charles Wesley's great Christmas hymns celebrate the fact of the Incarnation.

[98] Lindstrom, p. 55.

[99] Williams, p. 74. The quotation from Albert Outler is found in an unpublished paper, <u>The Methodist Contribution to the Ecumenical Discussion of the Church</u>. Williams also quotes G.C. Cell, <u>The Rediscovery of Wesley</u>: "The Atonement is the burning focus of faith for Wesley." p. 297.

[100] <u>On the Trinity</u>, <u>Works</u>, Vol. VI, p. 205.

In 1778 Wesley wrote:

> Indeed, nothing in the Christian system is of greater consequence than the doctrine of Atonement. It is properly the distinguishing point between Deism and Christianity. . . . Give up the Atonement, and the Deists are agreed with us.[101]

To emphasize the richness and the fullness of the work of Christ in redemption Wesley makes use of the doctrine of the three offices of Christ:

> It is our part thus to preach Christ, by preaching all things whatsoever He hath revealed. We may indeed, without blame, yea, and with a peculiar blessing from God, declare the love of our Lord Jesus Christ; we may speak, in a more especial manner, of the 'Lord our Righteousness'; we may expiate upon the grace of God in Christ, 'reconciling the world unto Himself'; we may at proper opportunities, dwell upon His praise, as 'bearing the iniquities of us all, as 'wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, that by His stripes we might be healed': but still we should not preach Christ according to His word, if we were wholly to confine ourselves to this; we are not ourselves clear before God, unless we proclaim Him in all His offices. To preach Christ, . . . is to preach Him, not only as our High-Priest, . . . but likewise as the Prophet of the Lord, . . . yea, and as remaining a King for ever; . . .[102]

However, Wesley's central emphasis was on the priestly work of Christ:

> In the fullness of time He was made man, another common Head of mankind, a second general Parent and Representative of the whole human race. And as such it was that 'He bore our griefs,' 'the Lord laying upon Him the iniquities of us all.' Then was He 'wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities.' 'He made His soul an offering for sin': He poured out His blood for the transgressors; He 'bare our sins in His own body on the tree,' that by His stripes we might be healed: and by that one oblation of

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[101] Letters, Vol. VI, pp. 297-298. Wesley does not claim to explain how Christ's death reconciles us to God, his concern lies in the fact of the Atonement.

[102] The Law Established Through Faith, II, S, Vol. II, pp. 76-77.

> Himself, once offered, He hath redeemed me and all mankind; having thereby 'made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.'[103]

Because of the Son's willing sacrifice on behalf of all mankind:

> God hath now 'reconciled the world to Himself, not imputing to them their' former 'trespasses.' And thus, 'as by the offence of one judgement came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification'; . . .[104]

This emphasis on the death and suffering of Christ, that is, His passive obedience, rather than His active obedience, predominates throughout Wesley's preaching. For example, faith is defined as:

> A divine evidence or conviction that 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing to them their' former 'trespasses'; and in particular, that the Son of God hath loved me, and given Himself for me; and that I, even I, am now reconciled to God by the blood of the cross.[105]

An important letter to James Hervey in 1756 indicates Wesley's reasons for concentrating on Christ's passive obedience. Wesley believed that the phrase "imputed righteousness of Christ" is not found in Scripture. "Then for Christ's and for the sake of the immortal souls which He has purchased with His blood, do not dispute for that particular phrase, 'the imputed righteousness of Christ,' it is not scriptural, it is not necessary."[106] Wesley was fearful of the Antinomian menace, the heart of which he took to be that Christ has met the demands of the law

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[103] S, Vol. I, p. 118.

[104] Ibid.

[105] The Way to the Kingdom, S, Vol. I, p. 160. cf. S, Vol. I, p. 130; Works, Vol. VIII, p. 48; Heb. 5:8.

[106] Letters, Vol. III, p. 372.

by His obedience; and therefore, man has no need to fulfill the moral law:

> Suppose, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'; then I am not obliged to love my neighbour: Christ has satisfied the demand of the law for me. Is not this the very quintessence of Antinomianism?[107]

Deschner points out that "Wesley can state his position in various ways, depending on whether he is attempting a careful, balanced statement, or simply expressing his own emphasis, or defending his position in the heat of debate."[108] When he is formulating his position with care, or making a gesture of reconciliation toward the Calvinists, he emphasizes the unity of the two obediences as the ground of our justification. . . . However, when Wesley is simply expressing his own emphasis, without regard to conciliation or problems, it is the passive obedience alone which has a significant role in our justification. . . . But when debate sharpened, Wesley could be driven to the extreme consequences of his position: he denies Christ's active obedience any role in purchasing our redemption; that is, in justification.[109]

Wesley's position on Christ's role in man's redemption is remarkably uncomplicated. His teaching at this point is simple and straighforward. Man is guilty before God and his punishment as the consequence of his sin is eternal death. Man is powerless to atone for his sins but in obedience to God, Jesus Christ freely takes upon Himself man's guilt and punishment. His sacrifice is the substitute which God accepts and the atoning death of the Son is the sole ground for man's salvation. We have noted above that Wesley, primarily an

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[107] Ibid., p. 386.

[108] Wesley's Christology, pp. 155-156.

[109] Ibid.

evangelist, is more concerned about the fact of the atonement that he is about the how. Wesley shows little interest in how God's justice is objectively fulfilled; his emphasis is upon the benefits accruing to man as a result of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In other words, Wesley's soteriological concern informs his Christology.

Salvation

In his attempt to delineate the scripture way of salvation Wesley observes that although:

> The salvation which is here spoken of might be extended to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul, till it is consummated in glory . . . we are at present concerned only with that salvation which the Apostle is directly speaking of. And this consists of two general parts, justification and sanctification.[110]

Justification

Justification by faith was not always a part of Wesley's belief or teaching:

> Since I believed justification by faith, which I have done upwards of thirty years, I have constantly maintained that we are pardoned and accepted wholly and solely for the sake of what Christ hath done and suffered for us.[111]

From 1738 on Wesley includes Justification by faith in 'those grand, fundamental, doctrines"[112] and in his letter to the clergymen of the Church of England he includes Justification by faith amongst the "three essentials" which are held by all who are in any way involved in

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[110] The Scripture Way of Salvation, S, Vol. II, p. 445. The question of how man comes to faith and Wesley's doctrine of Prevenient Grace will be discussed in Chapter IV.

[111] Letters, Vol. V, p. 90. cf. On the Wedding Garment, Works, Vol. VII, pp. 316-317.

[112] Notes on the Old Testament, Preface, p. ix.

the Methodist cause.[113] A further indication of the prominence which Wesley gave to this reformed principle is found in his note on Romans 6:12. Scripture must be expounded:

> According to that grand scheme of doctrine which is delivered therein; touching original sin, justification by faith, and present inward salvation. There is a wonderful analogy between all these; and a close and intrinsic connexion between the chief heads of that faith 'which was once delivered to the saints' Every article, therefore concerning which there is any question should be determined by this rule; every doubtful scripture interpreted according to the grand truths which run through the whole.[114]

Because this doctrine was so central in Wesley's preaching and teaching he had occasion to define Justification many times. The definition which occurs most often is: "The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins."[115]

In distinction from sanctification, "justification is what God does for us through His Son."[116] Justification "is that act of God the Father, whereby, for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of the Son, He 'showeth forth His righteousness' (or mercy) 'by the remission of the sins that are past.'"[117] This definition is echoed in the 1744 Conference Minutes:

> Q.1. What is to be justified?
>
> A. To be pardoned and received into God's favour; into

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[113] Letters, Vol. IV, p. 237.

[114] Notes on the New Testament.

[115] S, Vol. I, p. 119f.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid. cf. Mt. 11:28; Rom. 6:18.

> such a state, that if we continue therein, we shall be finally saved.[118]

In The Principles of a Methodist, Wesley agrees with the teaching of his church on the subject of justification as it is expressed in the Homily on Salvation:

> Three things must go together in our justification: Upon God's part, his great mercy and grace; upon Christ's part the satisfaction of God's justice, by the offering his body, and shedding his blood; and upon our part, true and living faith in the merits of Jesus Christ.[119]

The Role of Faith

Faith is the only requirement of justification. But it is always God's gift and never man's work: ". . . faith, which is the sole condition of justification is the faith which is wrought in us by the grace of God."[120]

Quoting again from the Homily on Salvation Wesley agrees that "neither our faith, nor our works justify us. . . ."[121] Faith is:

> The gift of God. No man is able to work it in himself. It is a work of omnipotence. It requires no less power thus to quicken a dead soul, than to raise a body that lies in the grave. It is a new creation; and none can create a soul anew, but He who at first created the heavens and the earth.[122]

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[118] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 275f. cf. Letters, Vol. II, p. 226. "Justification is the act of God, pardoning our sins and receiving us again to His favour. This was free in Him, because undeserved by us; undeserved, because we had transgressed His law, and could not, nor even can now, perfectly fulfil it." See also Rom. 3:24; Col. 2:14.

[119] Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 361-363.

[120] Letters, Vol. II, p. 199.

[121] Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 361-363. cf. Ephes. 2:8. ". . . Grace, without any respect to human worthiness, confers the glorious gift. Faith, with an empty hand, and without any pretence to personal desert, receives the heavenly blessing."

[122] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 5f.

The subjective note is well to the fore in Wesley's definition of saving faith:

> The true, living Christian faith, which whosoever hath is born of God, is not only assent, an act of understanding; but a disposition, which God hath wrought in his heart; a sure trust and confidence in God, that, through the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God.[123]

Faith is "the eye of the new-born soul" which enables the believer to see who it is that loves him and what manner of love it is that saves him. Faith is "the ear of the soul," awakening the sinner from the sleep of death, and enabling him to hear the Word of forgiveness. Faith is "the palate of the soul" which enables the sinner to taste the goodness and mercy of God. Faith is "the feeling of the soul," whereby the believer by the power of God, knows the presence of God, and experiences "the love of God shed abroad in his heart."[124]

But the object of faith is of first importance:

> What faith is it then through which we are saved? It may be answered, first, in general, it is a faith in Christ. Christ, and God through Christ, are the proper objects of it. Herein therefore it is sufficiently, absolutely, distinguished from the faith either of ancient or modern Heathens.[125]

The faith of contemporary man is different in content from that of the first Apostles:

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[123] The Marks of the New Birth, S, Vol. I, pp. 284-285. cf. The Scripture Way of Salvation, S, Vol. II, pp. 448-451; Works, Vol. VIII, p. 33: "The right and true Christian faith is, not only to believe the Holy Scriptures, and the articles of our faith, are true; but also to have a sure trust and confidence, to be saved from everlasting damnation through Christ."

[124] Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 4-5. cf. On Living Without God, Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 351-352.

[125] Salvation by Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 37f.

> And herein does it differ from that faith which the Apostles themselves had while our Lord was on earth, that it acknowledges the necessity and merit of his death, and the power of his resurrection. . . . Christian faith is, then, not only an assent to the whole gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ; a trust in the merits of his life, death, and resurrection; a recumbency upon him as our atonement and our life, as given for us, and living in us.[126]

Sanctification[127]

Wesley taught that sanctification begins with the new birth: "The new birth is the first point of sanctification, which may increase more and more into the perfect day."[128]

However, Wesley is careful to distinguish between the new birth and sanctification:

> Nor is the new birth the same with sanctification. New Birth (or regeneration) is part of sanctification, but not the whole of it. It is the gate to it, the entrance into it. When we are born again, then our sanctification, our inward and outward holiness begins, and thenceforward we are gradually to 'grow up in Him who is our Head.' This expression of the Apostle admirably illustrates the difference between one and the other, and farther points out the exact analogy there is between natural and spiritual things. A child is born of woman in a moment, or at least in a very short time: afterward he gradually and slowly grows, till he attains to the stature of a man. In like manner, a child is born of God in a short time, if not in a moment. But it is by slow degrees that he afterward grows up to the measure of the full stature of

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[126] Ibid.

[127] In his earlier work Wesley appears to be confused in the relation between regeneration and sanctification and uses these terms interchangeably. However, as we shall see, in his later thought he overcame this apparent confusion and very clearly shows the relation of these doctrines. Because of the central importance of holiness in the Wesleyan gospel, detailed study will be given to this theme in the next chapter.

[128] On God's Vineyard, Works, Vol. VII, p. 205.

> Christ. The same relation, therefore, which there is between our natural birth and our growth, there is also between our new birth and our sanctification.[129]

As early as 1739 Wesley distinguished between justification and sanctification:

> They speak of justification, either as the same thing with sanctification, or as something consequent upon it. I believe justification to be wholly distinct from sanctification, and necessarily antecedent to it.[130]

Nevertheless, justification and sanctification are coincident in experience: "And at the same time that we are justified, yea in that very moment, sanctification begins."[131] In his sermon on The New Birth Wesley explicitly indicates the distinction between justification and sanctification, a distinction which is logical and, as we have seen, not temporal: "In order of time neither of these is before the other, but in order of thinking, justification precedes the new birth."[132]

In what way then does Wesley distinguish them?

> If any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed 'fundamental' they are doubtless these two, - the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth: the former relating to that great work which God does for us, in forgiving our sins; the latter, to the great work which God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature.[133]

In another sermon Wesley states the distinction in the following way:

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[129] The New Birth, S, Vol. II, p. 240.

[130] Journal, Vol. II, p. 275.

[131] The Scripture Way of Salvation, S, Vol. II, p. 446.

[132] The New Birth, S, Vol. II, pp. 226-227.

[133] Ibid., p. 227.

> But though it be allowed, that justification and the new birth are, in point of time, inseparable from each other, yet are they easily distinguished as being not the same, but things of a widely different nature, justification implies only a relative, the new birth, a real, change. God in justifying us does something for us; in begetting us again, He does the work in us. The former changes our outward relation to God, so that of enemies we become children; by the latter our inmost souls are changed, so that of sinners we become saints. The one restores us to the favour, the other to the image, of God. The one is taking away the guilt, the other the taking away the power, of sin; so that, although they are joined together in point of time, yet are they of wholly distinct natures.[134]

The Nature of Regeneration

In our treatment of Wesley's doctrine of sin we observed that on the one hand he understood sin as guilt. A correlative to this understanding is his doctrine of justification where the emphasis lies on the forgiveness of man through the merits of Jesus Christ. On the other hand Wesley also gave prominence in his writings to sin as depravity. A correlative to this understanding is his doctrine of sanctification.[135] The ground of Wesley's doctrine of the new birth is that man has lost the image of God. Man's nature is consequently totally corrupt. Therefore, "God now requires a change of heart; and that without delay."[136] Wesley leaves us in no doubt that "the change of heart" which is required of man is a real change not a mere reformation of life:

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[134] The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God, S, Vol. I, pp. 299-300. cf. Working out our own Salvation, Works, Vol. VI, p. 509.

[135] Notes on the New Testament, Mt. 11:28. See also previous quote.

[136] Ibid., Luke 3:8; The New Birth, S, Vol. II, p. 231. "This, then, is the foundation of the new birth, - the entire corruption of our nature. Hence it is, that, being born in sin, we must be 'born again.' Hence every one that is born of a woman must be born of the Spirit of God."

> In this solemn discourse our Lord shows that no external profession, no ceremonial ordinances, or privileges of birth, could entitle any to the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom: that an entire change of heart, as well as life was necessary for that purpose: that this could only be wrought in man by the almighty power of God; . . . If our Lord, by being born again, means only reformation of life, instead of making any new discovery, He has only thrown a great deal of obscurity on what was before plain and obvious.[137]

In distinction from justification, the grace of regeneration is mediated by the Holy Spirit: "The one implies, what God does for us through His Son; the other, what He works in us by His Spirit."[138]

In the Notes on the New Testament Wesley comments as follows on I Corinthians, 6:11:

> And ye are inwardly sanctified; not before, but in consequence of your being justified in the name - That is, by the merits of the Lord Jesus, through which your sins are forgiven. And by the Spirit of our God - By whom ye are thus washed and sanctified.[139]

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[137] Ibid., John 3:3. cf. Letters, Vol. I, p. 328.

[138] Justification by Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 119. Wesley also attributes the grace of regeneration to the royal work of Christ: "To preach Christ, as a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, is to preach Him, not only as our great High-Priest, . . . but likewise as the Prophet of the Lord, 'who of God is made unto us wisdom'; who, by His Word and His spirit, is with us always, 'guiding us into all truth'; - yea, and as remaining a King for ever; as giving laws to all whom He has bought with His blood; as restoring those to the image of God, whom He had first reinstated in His favour; as reigning in all believing hearts until He has 'subdued all things to Himself,' - until He hath utterly cast out all sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness." The Law Established through Faith, S, Vol. II, pp. 76-77. cf. The Lord our Righteousness, S, Vol. II, p. 434.

[139] Notes on the New Testament, I Cor. 6:11. cf. Rom. 6:5. "For the sinner, being first convinced of his sin and danger by the Spirit of God, stands trembling before the awful tribunal of divine justice; and has nothing to plead, but his own guilt, and the merits of a Mediator. Christ here interposes; justice is satisfied; the sin is remitted, and pardon is applied to the soul, by a divine faith wrought by the Holy Ghost, who then begins the great work of inward sanctification." cf. I Thess. 6:8.

In attempting to answer the question as to how a man must be born again Wesley concedes that whilst we can be as sure of the fact of the new birth as we can be of the blowing of the wind, "the precise manner how it is done, how the Holy Spirit works this in the soul, neither thou nor the wisest of children of man is able to explain."[140] Notwithstanding, "without descending into curious, critical inquiries, we can give a plain scriptural account of the nature of the new birth."[141]

In his attempt to explicate the nature of the new birth, Wesley employs the analogy of natural birth:

> A man cannot 'enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born': but they may, spiritually: a man may be born from above, born of God, born of the Spirit, in a manner which bears a very near analogy to the natural birth.[142]

In the same way that an unborn child has eyes but cannot see, and has ears but cannot hear, so too is man in his natural state:

> Before he is born of God, he has in a spiritual sense, eyes and sees not; . . . he has ears but hears not. . . . His other spiritual senses are all locked up: he is in the same condition as if he had them not. Hence he has no knowledge of God; no intercourse with Him: he is not at all acquainted with Him. He has no true knowledge of the things of God, either of spiritual or eternal things; therefore, though he is a living man, he is a dead Christian.[143]

When a baby is born he enters a new world and all is changed. His eyes are opened and he begins to see the light. His ears are opened and he hears. He breathes and lives in a dimension altogether different from what he did before. The same is true of the man who is born of God,

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[140] The New Birth, S, Vol. II, p. 231.

[141] Ibid., p. 232.

[142] Ibid.

[143] Ibid., p. 233.

he enters into a different world and lives in a wholly different way:

> The 'eyes of his understanding' are opened. . . he sees the light of the glory of God, His glorious love, 'in the face of Jesus Christ.' His ears being opened, he is now capable of hearing the inward voice of God . . . He 'feels in his heart,' to use the language of our church, 'the mighty working of the Spirit of God'; . . . He feels 'the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto him'; and all his spiritual senses are then exercised to discern spiritual good and evil. . . . And now he may be properly said to live: God having quickened him by His Spirit, he is alive to God through Jesus Christ.[144]

Man owes not only his new birth to the supernatural act of God but his continued life in fellowship with the Father and the Son is sustained by what Wesley terms a spiritual respiration:

> The spirit or breath of God is immediately inspired, breathed into the new-born soul; and the same breath which comes from, returns to, God: as it is continually received by faith, so it is continually rendered back by love, by prayer, and praise, and prayer being the breath of every soul which is truly born of God.[145]

Wesley is now ready to describe the nature of the new birth. In the first place, it is a change brought about by God. This change He affects by the Holy Spirit:

> It is that great change which God works in the soul when He brings it into life; when He raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. It is the change wrought in the whole soul by the almighty Spirit of God when it is 'created anew in Christ Jesus'; . . .[146]

In the second place, it is a <u>real</u> change within man resulting in a new attitude toward God and toward man:

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[144] <u>Ibid</u>.

[145] <u>The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God</u>, S, Vol. I, p. 303.

[146] <u>The New Birth</u>, S, Vol. II, p. 234.

> When the love of the world is changed into the love of God; pride into humility; passion into meekness; hatred, envy, malice, into a sincere, tender, disinterested love for all mankind. In a word, it is that change whereby the earthly, sensual, devilish mind is turned into the 'mind which was in Christ Jesus.'[147]

In the third place, it is a change which can be empirically observed and described. The marks of the new birth are listed by Wesley as being Faith, Hope, and Love.[148]

In the fourth place, allowance is made for growth and development:

> And by this new kind of spiritual respiration, spiritual life is not only sustained, but increased day by day, together with spiritual strength, and motion, and sensation; all the senses of the soul being now awake, and capable of discerning spiritual good and evil.[149]

However, the growth referred to is never automatic but is dependent upon man's response in love to God's grace:

> He will not continue to breathe into our soul, unless our soul breathes toward Him again; unless our love, and prayer, and thanksgiving return to Him, a sacrifice wherewith He is well pleased.[150]

It is obvious from the above summary that Wesley's major concern in his doctrine of regeneration is on the reality of the inward change which must be evidenced in the holy life. Any claim to regeneration must be substantiated not by proof of baptism but by the fruits of the spirit:

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[147] Ibid.

[148] The Marks of the New Birth, S, Vol. I, p. 283f.

[149] The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God, S, Vol. I, p. 303.

[150] Ibid., p. 311-312.

> The question is not, what you (was) made in baptism (do not evade); but what are you now? . . . I ask not, whether you was born of water and of the Spirit; but are you now the temple of the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in you?[151]

At work here is Wesley's fundamental concern for a fresh, vitalized understanding of what it means to be a Christian in an age where profession was sadly at variance with practice:

> Say not then in your heart, 'I was once baptized, therefore I am now a child of God.' Alas, that consequence will by no means hold. How many are the baptized gluttons and drunkards, the baptized liars and common swearers, the baptized railers and evil speakers, the baptized whoremongers, thieves, extortioners? What think you? Are these now the children of God?[152]

Elsewhere Wesley makes a radical distinction between baptism and the new birth:

> And, first, it follows, that baptism is not the new birth: they are not one and the same thing. Many indeed seem to imagine that they are just the same; at least, they speak as if they thought so; but I do not know that this opinion is publicly avowed by any denomination of Christians whatever.[153]

It follows that baptism is not necessarily accompanied by regeneration: "A man may possibly be 'born of water' and yet not be 'born of the spirit.' There may sometimes be the outward sign, where

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[151] The Marks of the New Birth, S, Vol. I, p. 295.

[152] Ibid. cf. Works, Vol. VIII, p. 48: "I tell a sinner, 'you must be born again.' 'No,' say you: 'He was born again in baptism. Therefore he cannot be born again now.' Alas, what trifling is this! What, if he was then a child of God? He is now manifestly a child of the devil; for the works of his father he doeth. Therefore, do not play upon words. He must go through an entire change of heart.'

[153] The New Birth, S, Vol. II, p. 237. Wesley quotes in support of his statement, the Larger Catechism of the Presbyterian Church; and the Anglican Catechism.

there is not the inward grace."[154]

Thus Wesley can urge his hearers and his readers to:

> Lean no more on the staff of that broken reed, that ye were born again in baptism. Who denies that ye were then made children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven? But, notwithstanding this, ye are now children of the devil. Therefore, ye must be born again.[155]

In concluding our study on Wesley's doctrine of regeneration we call attention to his teaching that in the same way that justification is through faith alone, so too regeneration is the gift of God's grace and is received through faith alone. This is implicit in his teaching that justification and sanctification are coincident in experience. Whether Wesley is describing the faith that justifies or the faith through which the new birth is mediated it is the same faith:

> But the moment the Spirit of the Almighty strikes the heart of him that was till then without God in the world, it breaks the hardness of his heart, and creates all things new . . . He sees, so far as his newly-opened eyes can bear the sight . . . By the same gracious stroke, he that before had ears, but heard not, is now made capable of hearing . . . Meantime, it may easily be observed, that the substance of all these figurative expressions is comprised in that one word, faith, taken in its widest sense; being enjoyed, more or less, by every one that believeth in the name of the Son of God.[156]

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[154] Ibid., p. 238. Numerous Wesleyan interpreters have commented on the tension which exists within Wesley's teaching on baptism. In taking over his father's essay on baptism Wesley apparently endorses the teaching of his church which states that in baptism we are regenerated or born again. We do not have time to deal with this apparent contradiction. Two recent works have dealt with this problem in some detail; namely, John Wesley's Theology Today, by Colin Williams, which we have already had occasion to refer to earlier, and John Wesley's Doctrine of the Sacraments, by John R. Parris, (London: Epworth Press, 1963). However, despite these works a thorough investigation into Wesley's doctrine of baptism needs to be attempted.

[155] The Marks of the New Birth, S, Vol. I, p. 296.

[156] On Living Without God, Works, Vol. VII, pp. 351-352.

When the 1744 Conference was in session one of the subjects under consideration was the doctrine of sanctification. Among the questions asked was whether faith was the condition or the instrument, of sanctification. The answer is recorded in the Minutes:

> It is both the condition and instrument of it. When we begin to believe, then sanctification begins. And as faith increases, holiness increases, till we are created anew.[157]

This is in accord with Wesley's sermon, The Marks of the New Birth, where he singles out faith as the first mark and the foundation of all the rest.[158] But this faith which Wesley sees as the condition of regeneration is not man's discovery of God's power, nor is it "a barely notional or speculative faith . . . but a disposition, which God hath wrought in his heart."[159] Thus the source of salvation is always the grace of God. Whilst Wesley expresses the fact of God's grace in various ways, one thing comes through with great force: at the center of Wesley's preaching and teaching is God's grace for fallen man:

> The author of faith and salvation is God alone. It is he that works in us both to will and to do. He is the sole Giver of every good gift, and the sole Author of every good work. There is no more of power than of

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[157] Minutes of Some Late Conversations, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 279. cf. Advice to the People called Methodists, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 352.

[158] The Marks of the New Birth, S, Vol. I, p. 283f.

[159] Ibid.

> merit in man; but as all merit is in the Son of God, in what he has done and suffered for us, so all power is in the Spirit of God.[160]

Earlier it was shown that a major emphasis in the content of the gospel which Wesley taught was the design of God's deed on behalf of man. That God's intention is to restore His original purpose for man which had been thwarted by man's disobedience. The quintessence of God's nature is love, 'To me, to all, Thy mercies flow.' The second major emphasis in Wesley's theology is the shape of man's need. Man's position before God is that of sinner. Not only because he shares in Adam's sin and guilt, but also because every man is his own Adam. Man, in his guilt and depravity, is deserving only of death. In the mercy of God, however, a way of escape is provided through the merits of Christ's redeeming work. Salvation, Wesley affirms, is totally the work of God and he discusses this under two parts: justification and sanctification. Man is justified solely by faith and faith itself is 'wrought in us by the grace of God.' Sanctification begins with the new birth but the character of the new life into which God's deed summons man does not end here.

Indeed to stop here would be to present a wholly inadequate picture of Wesley's understanding of the gospel. In Chapter I it was shown how Wesley's quest for personal holiness was determined in large measure by his concern to become an agent of reconciliation, or an instrument

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[160] A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 49. cf. The Scripture Way of Salvation, S, Vol. II, p. 445; Letters, Vol. V, p. 7: "Neither can I discern that there is any more difference between us with regard to the means of sanctification; or with regard to the fruit of those means, which we both continually maintain to spring wholly and solely from the almighty grace of God, which alone worketh all in and by them all."

in the hand of the Divine Physician. He sought to become this because he believed that in doing so he would be glorifying God, and this he believed, was his purpose on earth. Holiness, for Wesley, was oriented toward evangelism. But it is equally certain that the end of evangelism for Wesley, was holiness!

In a very real sense Wesley understood justification and sanctification to be the starting point in man's salvation. An urgent and indispensable starting point, but nevertheless only a starting point. Wesley believed that God's purpose for the believer was that he should be holy and he understood this as an integral part of salvation. Therefore, his evangelism was consistently directed toward this purpose. The end of Christ's coming is not merely deliverance from sin "but the being filled with the fullness of God."[161] God's purpose for man is not only that he should be born again but that he should be holy! "Wherefore, to what end, it is necessary that we should be born again? It is very easily discerned, that this is necessary, first, in order to holiness."[162] Elsewhere Wesley explicitly identifies salvation with holiness: "Salvation, in this sense, and holiness, are synonymous terms."[163]

Any examination, therefore, of the Wesleyan gospel, must take into account Wesley's teaching that God's purpose for the believer is that he should be holy. In Wesley's view, to proclaim anything less than "ye shall be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect"[164] is tantamount to preaching half the gospel.

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[161] The End of Christ's Coming, Works, Vol. VI, p. 274f.

[162] The New Birth, S, Vol. II, p. 235f.

[163] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 47.

[164] Mt. 5:48.

Insofar as holiness is the end toward which all of Wesley's evangelism moves a consideration of his teaching on holiness warrants a separate chapter.

CHAPTER III

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR THE BELIEVER

We have seen that Wesley's teaching on holiness is crucial to an understanding of how he conceived the gospel entrusted to him. It is necessary, therefore, to study in some depth Wesley's search for holiness, the development of his thought in this critical area of his theology, and more especially, his mature thought concerning holiness as the purpose of God for believers.

The Search for Holiness

In the tract which is usually denominated The Large Minutes, the fundamental purpose and genesis of Methodism was considered:

> Q.3. What may we reasonably believe to be God's design in raising up the Preachers called Methodists?
>
> A. Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.[1]

This was followed by a further question:

> Q.4. What was the rise of Methodism, so called?
>
> A. In 1729, two young men, reading the Bible, saw they could not be saved without holiness, followed after it, and incited others so to do. In 1737 they saw holiness comes by faith. They saw likewise, that men are justified before they are sanctified, but still holiness was their point.[2]

The fullest account of Wesley's search for holiness prior to 1738 can be found in his Journal for that period. In his Journal he

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[1] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 299.

[2] Ibid., p. 300.

reviews the events which led up to the Aldersgate experience of May 24, 1738: "What occured on Wednesday the 24th, I think best to relate at large, after premissing what may make it the better understood."[3] Wesley begins with his early years in the Epworth parsonage and owns that "all that was said to me of inward obedience or holiness I neither understood nor remembered."[4] Neither his school days at Charterhouse nor his early years as a student at Christ Church, Oxford, gave Wesley "so much as a notion of inward holiness."[5] It was in 1725 under the influence of Kempis's Christian Pattern that Wesley "began to aim at, and pray for, inward holiness."[6] Wesley's reading of William Law's Christian Perfection and Serious Call strengthened his determination to obtain holiness and thereby earn his eternal salvation.[7] A lengthy account follows of Wesley's vain attempt to achieve inward holiness by good works. On the one hand he used all the means of grace and practiced every means of self-denial and fasting. On the other, he visited the prisons and assisted the poor and the sick. The missionary venture to Georgia and the subsequent return to England continue the description of a man valiantly attempting to achieve holiness of heart and life in an effort to earn acceptance with God. The events which led up to Wesley's visit to the meeting-house on Aldersgate Street have been

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[3] Journal, Vol. I, p. 465f. The following review should be compared with a similar account in A Plain Account of Christian Perfection. Works, Vol. XI, p. 366f.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid. In the Plain Account Wesley includes Bishop Jeremy Taylor's Rule and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying as being a major influence in his quest for holiness. Works, Vol. XI, p. 366.

[7] Ibid.

related many times and we do not have to repeat them here. Suffice to say that it was during these eventful months that Wesley was convinced of the foolishness of trusting in his own righteousness and his acceptance of the reformed principle of sola fide.

We have already noted that although Aldersgate radically changed Wesley's understanding of the means or way to holiness his goal was still the same:

> Many years since, I saw that 'without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' I began following after it, and inciting all with whom I had any intercourse to do the same. Ten years after, God gave me a clearer view that I had before of the way to attain this - namely, by faith in the Son of God. And immediately I declared to all, 'We are saved from sin, we are made holy, by faith.'[8]

In another letter written in 1773 Wesley notes:

> We set out upon two principles: (1) None go to heaven without holiness of heart and life; (2) whosoever follows after this (whatever his opinions be) is my 'brother and sister and mother.' And we have not swerved an hair's breadth from either one or the other of these to this day.[9]

Six months before he died Wesley articulated the relation between holiness and the rise of Methodism in the following way: "This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodist; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly he appeared to have raised us up."[10]

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[8] Letters, Vol. V, p. 258. cf. On God's Vineyard, Works, Vol. VII, p. 205, "Therefore, they maintain, with equal zeal and diligence, the doctrine of free, full, present justification, on the one hand, and of entire sanctification both of heart and life, on the other; being as tenacious of inward holiness as any Mystic, and of outward, as any Pharisee."

[9] Letters, Vol. VI, p. 61. cf. Works, Vol. VIII, p. 353.

[10] Letters, Vol. VIII, p. 238. cf. The General Spread of the Gospel, Works, Vol. VI, p. 281. "Between fifty and sixty years ago, God raised up a few young men, in the University of Oxford, to testify those grand truths, which were then little attended to: That without holiness no man

The Influence of Scripture

In Chapter II it was pointed out that the primary source of Wesley's theology was Scripture. There is abundant evidence that Scripture was not only the strongest influence in Wesley's formation of his doctrine of holiness but that he judged all other writings on the subject by the touchstone of Scripture. This is not to discount the large and varying groups of writings which influenced his thought. We have already made mention of some of these. However, it is not necessary to list them all here.[11]

In his account of the steps which led him to embrace the doctrine of Christian Perfection, Wesley acknowledges his indebtedness to the Bible:

> In the year 1729, I began not only to read, but to study, the Bible, as the one, the only standard of truth, and the only model of pure religion. Hence I say, in a clearer and clearer light, the indispensable necessity of having 'the mind which was in Christ,' and of 'walking as Christ also walked'; even of having, not some part only, but all the mind which was in him; and of walking, as he walked, not only in many or most respects, but in all things.[12]

The way to avoid setting perfection too high or too low is

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shall see the Lord; - that this holiness is the work of God, who worketh in us both to will and to do; - that he doeth it of his own good pleasure, merely for the merits of Christ; - that this holiness is the mind that was in Christ; enabling us to walk as he also walked; - that no man can be thus sanctified till he be justified; - and, that, we are justified by faith alone."

[11] There are a number of books which attempt to trace those writings which had the strongest influence on Wesley at this point. They include R.N. Flew, The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology, (London: Oxford University Press, 1934) and John L. Peters, Christian Perfection and American Methodism, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956).

[12] A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, Works, Vol. XI, p. 367.

"by keeping to the Bible and setting it just as high as the Scripture does."[13] In 1764 Wesley set down his doctrine of Christian Perfection in eleven short propositions. At the head of the list is: "There is such a thing as perfection; for it is again and again mentioned in Scripture."[14] When his critics referred to the doctrine of perfection as "Mr. Wesley's," John Wesley wrote:

> This is not his doctrine any more than it is yours, or any one else's, that is a minister of Christ. For it is His doctrine, peculiarly, emphatically His! It is the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Those are His words, not mine:
>
> - 'Ye shall therefore be perfect as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.'. . . It is the doctrine of St. Paul, the doctrine of St. James, of St. Peter, and of St. John; and no otherwise Mr. Wesley's than as it is the doctrine of every one who preaches the pure and the whole gospel. I tell you, as plain as I can speak, where and when I found this. I found it in the oracles of God, in the Old and New Testaments; when I read them with no other view or desire but to save my own soul.[15]

To one who protested against the use of the word perfection, Wesley replied: "As to the word, it is scriptural; therefore neither you nor I can in conscience object against it, unless we would send the Holy Spirit to school. . . ."[16]

Wesley's Notes on the New Testament abound with references to his doctrine of holiness. So much so that the impression is gained

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[13] Ibid., p. 397.

[14] Ibid., p. 441.

[15] Ibid., p. 444.

[16] Letters, Vol. IV, p. 212. cf. Christian Perfection, S, Vol. II, p. 151: "The word perfect is what many cannot bear . . . and hence, some have advised, wholly to lay aside the use of those expressions, 'because they have given so great offence.' But are they not found in the oracles of God? . . . We may not, therefore, lay these expressions aside, seeing they are the words of God and not of man."

that Wesley regarded this doctrine as an interpretative principle for the whole Scripture. The fifth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel is, in Wesley's estimation, a description of "the nature of inward holiness" and verse 48 is the promise that this holiness can be ours. "He will put those 'laws in our minds, and write them upon our hearts.'"[17] Another important verse, to which we shall have to return, is: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."[18] Other key verses which Wesley singles out for comment include: II Cor. 6:1;[19] Eph. 1:12;[20] Col. 1:22;[21] I Peter 2:2;[22] and I Peter 4:11.[23]

Finally, Wesley is ready to abandon his doctrine if it can be proved unscriptural: "The opinion I have concerning it at present, I espouse merely because I think it scriptural; if, therefore, I am convinced it is not scriptural, I shall willingly relinquish it."[24]

We proceed now to a formal statement of Wesley's doctrine of holiness as God's purpose for the believer.

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[17] Notes on the New Testament, Mt. 5:48.

[18] Ibid., Heb. 12:14. Wesley comments: "The not following after all holiness is the direct way to fall into sin of every kind."

[19] Ibid. "We receive the grace of God by faith; and not in vain if we add to this persevering holiness."

[20] Ibid. God's purpose for the believer is not only salvation, "but he is foreappointed of God to walk in holiness."

[21] Ibid. The end of reconciliation is holiness toward God.

[22] Ibid. To be a Christian implies growth through the word of God: "In faith, love, holiness, unto the full stature of Christ."

[23] The oracles of God demand of believers that they follow after, practical holiness: "He that treats of faith and leaves out repentance, or does not enjoin practical holiness to believers, does not speak as the oracles of God." This is a case in point where Wesley introduces the idea of holiness where the text does not explicitly call for it.

[24] Letters, Vol. III, p. 167.

Sanctification As An Ongoing Process

The Reality of Sin in the Believer

In the previous chapter we noted that regeneration is only the beginning of sanctification. Sanctification as an ongoing process is necessary because of the persistence of sin in the believer. This Wesley believed to be a contradiction of the promise and demand found in the Bible. In the early years of the Revival, Wesley believed that in the moment of justification and regeneration the believer is delivered from all sin:

> Ye are saved (to comprise all in one word) from sin. . . . And neither here, nor in other parts of holy writ, is there any limitation or restriction. All His people, or, as it is elsewhere expressed, 'all that believe in Him,' He will save from all their sins; from original and actual, past and present sin, 'of the flesh and of the spirit.' Through faith that is in Him, they are saved both from the guilt and power of it.[25]

In the same sermon Wesley intensifies this view and claims that the believer does not sin by habitual sin, nor by any wilful sin, nor by any single desire, nor does he sin by infirmities.[26] The dangers attached to such a view are obvious. On the one hand the ever-present threat of Antinomianism is greatly encouraged, and on the other, believers are brought into a state of constant despair when by implication their bondage to sin is apparently due to their lack of faith in God's power to save. Although Wesley soon abandoned the view that the believer is delivered from all sin in the initial act of regeneration, he never lost sight of the goal, nor did he lose his confidence in the grace of

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[25] Salvation by Faith, S, Vol. I, pp. 41-42. This sermon was preached three weeks after Wesley's Aldersgate experience.

[26] Ibid., p. 44. cf. The Marks of the New Birth, S, Vol. I, p. 280f. This sermon was also preached early on in the Revival.

God which enables man to realize this goal.

It was Scripture and experience that taught Wesley differently. Not merely the experience of his own pursuit of holiness but more especially the experience of the members of his societies:

> That the corruption of nature does still remain, even in those who are the children of God by faith; that they have in them the seeds of pride and vanity, of anger, lust, and evil desire, yea, sin of every kind; is too plain to be denied, being a matter of daily experience.[27]

In 1763 Wesley recorded in his Journal:

> I retired to Lewisham, and wrote the sermon on 'Sin in Believers' in order to remove a mistake which some were labouring to propagate - that there is no sin in any that are justified.[28]

The sermon referred to is an important corrective to Wesley's earlier views and will repay close study. Wesley established the importance of the subject under consideration in that it concerns both the present and the future happiness of every serious Christian. The question with which Wesley is dealing is not whether a believer commits outward sin or no; he takes for granted that no Christian would be guilty of this without a prior fall from grace. Nor is he concerned with the question of whether or not inward sin (which he defines as "any disposition contrary to the mind which was in Christ.")[29] will be

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[27] The First-fruits of the Spirit, S, Vol. I, p. 169. Nevertheless, the seeds of sin in the heart of the believer do not of themselves incur condemnation. cf. Journal, Vol. II, p. 159 (June 23, 1740): "Ye who have known and felt your sins forgiven, cast not away your confidence . . . yea, though (3) you should find a body of sin still in you, and thrusting sore at you that you might fall. . . . Your finding sin remaining in you is still no proof that you are not a believer. Sin does remain in one that is justified, though it has not dominion over him."

[28] Journal, Vol. V, p. 10.

[29] On Sin in Believers, S, Vol. II, p. 365.

in man until he dies; nor is Wesley concerned at this time with the problem of the perseverance of the saints. The question with which he is wrestling is simply this: "Is a justified or regenerate man freed from all sin as soon as he is justified?"[30]

It is with some reluctance that Wesley answers his question in the negative. He grounds his position, characteristically, on Scripture: "But was he not then freed from all sin, so that there is no sin in his heart? I cannot say this; I cannot believe it; because St. Paul says to the contrary."[31]

Wesley believes that the position taken by the Church of England reflects the teaching of the Primitive Church:

> And herein our own Church (as indeed in most points) exactly copies after the primitive; declaring in her Ninth Article, 'Original sin is the corruption of the nature of every man, whereby man is in his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth contrary to the Spirit. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated. . . .'[32]

Scripture is confirmed by experience: "And as this position, 'There is no sin in a believer, no carnal mind, no bent to back-sliding,' is thus contrary to the Word of God, so it is to the experience of His children."[33]

A further factor influencing Wesley's position is that "it is absolutely new, never heard of in the world until yesterday."[34] A

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid. Wesley quotes in support - Gal. 5:17; I Cor. 1:2; I Cor. 3:1-3; and Rev. 2:2-4.

[32] Ibid., p. 361. cf. Letters, Vol. II, p. 190: "I mean the same as our Church means by 'sin remains in the regenerate.'"

[33] Ibid., pp. 368-369.

[34] Ibid., p. 370.

final reason for Wesley's disavowal of the belief that there is no sin in the believer from the moment of justification is: "Because it is naturally attended with the most fatal consequences - not only grieving those whom God hath not grieved, but perhaps dragging them into everlasting perdition."[35]

Wesley, we remember, distinguished between sin as guilt and sin as depravity. The first is pardoned in justification and the second is cleansed in regeneration. Although Wesley consistently argues that the believer is delivered from the guilt and power of sin, the being of sin remains.[36] The new believer is but a "babe in Christ,"[37] and must grow into the mature man. It does not follow that the sign of growth is that the believer becomes increasingly less conscious of sin within him. On the contrary, the more he grows the more aware he becomes of his own sinfulness:

> Nevertheless, the conviction we feel of inbred sin is deeper and deeper every day. The more we grow in grace, the more we advance in the knowledge and love of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ (as great a mystery as this may appear to those who know not the power of God unto salvation), the more do we discern of our alienation from God, of the enmity that is in our carnal mind, and the necessity of our being entirely renewed in righteousness and true holiness.[38]

This prepares us for Wesley's teaching to which we shall return later in this chapter. No matter at what stage of development the believer might be there is always room for growth. One of the positive aspects of Wesley's insistence on sin in the believer is that awareness of sin can

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[35] Ibid., p. 370.

[36] Ibid., p. 373.

[37] Ibid., pp. 367, 371, 372.

[38] Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, I, S, Vol. I, p. 329.

by viewed as growing pains. To be sensitive to our sinfulness is part of growing into Christian maturity. The awareness of sin, therefore, should be regarded by the believer not as a cause for despair but a cause for thankfulness and an encouragement to go on to perfection.

Following Paul's distinction between the flesh and the spirit, Wesley believes that there are two warring forces within the believer. There is the principle of holiness because even the babe in Christ is holy in some degree; and there is the principle of sin, for even the greatest saint is aware of sin:

> Indeed, this grant point, that there are two contrary principles in believers - nature and grace, the flesh and the Spirit - runs through all the Epistles of St. Paul, yea, through all the Holy Scriptures; almost all the directions and exhortations therein are founded on this supposition; pointing at wrong tempers or practices in those who are, notwithstanding, acknowledged by the inspired writers to be believers. And they are continually exhorted to fight with and conquer these by the power of the faith which was in them.[39]

God's Perfecting Grace

Wesley's moral realism concerning the true nature of man and the pervasiveness of sin is balanced by his supreme confidence in the Grace of God. "He who, having justified, hath begun to sanctify you, will carry on this work, till it issue in glory."[40]

God, who initiated man's salvation, is the sole source of grace enabling man to grow to maturity. Perfecting grace is the same grace which is operative in justification and regeneration because the whole of salvation belongs to God. Perfecting grace is made available to man through Jesus Christ:

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[39] On Sin in Believers, S, Vol. II, p. 367. cf. Ibid., pp. 377-378.

[40] Notes on the New Testament, Phil. 1:6.

> Righteousness is the fruit of God's reigning in the heart. And what is righteousness, but love? - the love of God and of all mankind, flowing from faith in Jesus Christ, and producing humbleness of mind, meekness, gentleness, longsuffering, patience, deadness to the world; and every right disposition of heart, toward God and toward man.[41]

But more often Wesley attributes the mediation of God's grace to the Holy Spirit:

> I believe the infinite and eternal Spirit of God, equal with the Father and the Son, to be not only perfectly holy in Himself, but the immediate cause of all Holiness in us; . . . purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies, to a full and eternal enjoyment of God.[42]

Moreover, the grace of God is never cheap. The general means whereby man receives God's sanctifying grace are specified by Wesley as "universal obedience, keeping all the commandments, denying ourselves, and taking up our cross daily."[43] The particular means are "prayer, searching the Scripture, communicating and fasting."[44] The believer is given grace as a free gift in the believer's participation in the means of grace appointed by Scripture. The gift of grace must be used before a further gift of grace is bestowed. But even the believer's response is possible only through grace.

Over against his teaching of the pervasiveness and persistence of sin, Wesley sets forth the promise of God's continuing grace by which God's purpose for the believer can be realized:

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[41] Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, IX, S, Vol. I, pp. 506-507.

[42] Letters, Vol. III, p. 9.

[43] Minutes of Conference, Aug. 2, 1745, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 285f.

[44] Ibid., Notes on the New Testament, II Cor. 6:1: "We receive the grace of God not in vain, if we add to this persevering holiness."

> First, believe that God has promised to save you from all sin, and to fill you with all holiness. Secondly, believe that he is able thus 'to save to the uttermost all that come unto God through him.' Thirdly, believe that he is willing, as well as able, to save you to the uttermost; to purify you from all sin, and fill up all your heart with love. Believe, Fourthly, that he is not only able, but willing to do it now! Not when you come to die; not at any distant time; not tomorrow, but today. He will then enable you to believe, it is done, according to his word.[45]

Believer's Repentance

Repentance is necessary after justification as much as it is necessary before because it opens the way for God's grace to forgive and to perfect. The ground for repentance is, as we have seen, persistence of sin in the believer. To deny this would be to stifle growth:

> If, therefore, we think we are quite made whole already, there is no room to seek any further healing. On this supposition it is absurd to expect a farther deliverance from sin, whether gradual or instantaneous.[46]

The growth of the believer is contingent upon his repentance and faith in the same way that "former faith and repentance were, in order, to our entering into the kingdom of God."[47] Wesley defines this latter repentance as, "one kind of self-knowledge, the knowing ourselves sinners, yea, guilty, helpless sinners, even though we know we are children of God."[48] Beginning with pride Wesley catalogues a long list of symptoms which forbids the believer to imagine that he is

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[45] On Patience, Works, Vol. VI, p. 492.

[46] Repentance of Believers, S, Vol. II, p. 394.

[47] Ibid., p. 380ff. cf. The Scripture Way of Salvation, S, Vol. II, p. 453: "I allow there is a repentance consequent upon, as well as a repentance previous to, justification."

[48] Ibid.

without sin. The list is divided into sins which lurk within the heart, such as self-will, jealousies, covetousness, etc., and sinful actions, such as uncharitable and unprofitable conversations, etc.[49] Those who are not convicted of these sinful attitudes and actions must examine very closely their intentions. Wesley's description of the man who in the midst of doing good succumbs to pride shows remarkable discernment and is so vivid that one can only conclude that he writes from his own experience: "When they are comforting the afflicted, or provoking one another to love and to good works, do they never perceive an inward self-condemnation, 'Now you have spoken well'"?[50]

Repentance, therefore, "is a conviction of all this sin remaining in their hearts."[51] It is also "a conviction of their guiltiness."[52] A further branch of this repentance is the believers' conviction of their utter helplessness which takes two forms. Firstly, it is a realization that they are completely dependent upon the grace of God for their every good thought and action. Therefore, repentance is an attitude of mind and spirit rather than an isolated act or even a series of acts. It is a constant openness to the grace of God which is not given all at once, "as if they had a stock laid up for many years, but from moment to moment."[53] Second, no matter how hard the believer may fight against the remaining sin in his life he is impotent by virtue of his sinfulness

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[49] Ibid., pp. 381-386.

[50] Ibid., p. 386.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., p. 389. Wesley qualifies this by adding that although they are worthy of condemnation, the life, death and intercession of Jesus Christ continues to mediate for them.

[53] Ibid.

and thus powerless to either atone for his sin or to cease from sinning.

The believer is brought to the conviction of continuing sinfulness and the sense of utter helplessness by what Wesley terms the third use of the law. In demonstrating why the moral law is still valid, Wesley declares:

> We have not done with this law: For it is still of unspeakable use. First, in convincing us of the sin that yet remains both in our hearts and lives, and thereby keeping us close to Christ, that His blood may cleanse us every moment; secondly, in deriving strength from our Head into His living members, whereby He empowers them to do what His law commands; and thirdly, in confirming our hope of whatsoever it commands and we have not yet attained, - of receiving grace upon grace, till we are in actual possession of the fullness of His promises.[54]

Elsewhere Wesley attributes the conviction of sin within the believer to the work of the Holy Spirit: "It is properly a conviction, wrought by the Holy Ghost, of the sin which still remains in our heart."[55] Thus it is not the law as such which convicts of sin, but the Holy Spirit who applies the law to our hearts. "The third use of the law is, to keep us alive. It is the grand means whereby the blessed Spirit prepares the believer for larger communications of the life of God."[56] Repentance, therefore, keeps the believer humble and aware of his complete dependence upon God. The life of the believer is dynamic rather than static; there is no such thing as a state of sanctification.

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[54] The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law, S, Vol. II, p. 54. We will return to Wesley's teaching on Law and Gospel in Chapter V.

[55] The Scripture Way of Salvation, S, Vol. II, p. 454.

[56] The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law, S, Vol. II, p. 53.

The Role of Faith in Sanctification

We recall Wesley's understanding of two opposing principles operating within the believer. He refers to these as nature and grace, or, the flesh and the Spirit. Repentance corresponds to nature or flesh, and faith corresponds to grace or spirit. Repentance and faith interact on each other. The believer is convicted of his sin by the Holy Spirit. This conviction leads him to repent. But he is not left in despair, for the act of repentance evokes faith in Christ who can save him from all sin. On the one hand, repentance is a constant reminder of the reality of sin; on the other hand, faith is the constant reminder of God's offer of sanctifying grace. No matter how repentant a man may be "he is not sanctified till he believes."[57] Wesley describes the interaction of repentance and faith in the following way:

> Thus it is, that in the children of God, repentance and faith exactly answer each other. By repentance we feel the sin remaining in our hearts, and cleaving to our words and actions: by faith, we receive the power of God in Christ, purifying our hearts, and cleansing our hands. By repentance, we are still sensible that we deserve punishment for all our tempers, and words, and actions: by faith, we are conscious that our Advocate with the Father is continually pleading for us, and thereby continually turning aside all condemnation and punishment from us. By repentance we have an abiding conviction that there is no help in us: by faith we receive not only mercy, 'but grace to help in' every 'time of need.' Repentance disclaims the very possibility of any other help: faith accepts all the help we stand in need of, from Him that hath all power in heaven and earth. Repentance says, 'Without Him I can do nothing': faith says, 'I can do all things through Christ strengthening me.'[58]

Sanctifying faith therefore keeps the believer from despair and despondency which would otherwise be inevitable. Sanctifying faith

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[57] The Scripture Way of Salvation, S, Vol. II, p. 456.

[58] The Repentance of Believers, S, Vol. II, p. 394.

opens the believer to the possibility of renewed forgiveness and cleansing through the power of God in Jesus Christ. Sanctifying faith reminds the believer of the height and depth of God's love and calls forth the response of love for God and man. It is ever the experiential knowledge of the love of God which motivates the believer to works of piety and works of mercy. Sanctifying faith enables the believer to trust in the promise of God. There is a difference between God's power and His promise to exert His power on behalf of the believer. But by faith in God's word the believer knows that God has so promised.[59] God's purpose for the believer is that he should be holy and He who demands holiness is also able to give what He commands:

> He is able to save you from all the sin that still remains in your heart. He is able to save you from all the sin that cleaves to all your words and actions. He is able to save you from sins of omission, and to supply whatever is wanting in you. It is true, this is impossible with man; but with God-Man all things are possible.[60]

Wesley warns the believer that Satan will attempt to wrest his faith from him and thus destroy any further possibility of holiness. Satan does this by pointing the believer to the reality of his sin and to the holiness which is demanded of him. Thus he would rob the believer of his joy and his peace. But he also attempts to weaken if not destroy the faith of the believer for his joy and peace depend upon his faith:

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[59] Ibid., p. 391. Wesley quotes from Deut. 30:6; Ezek. 36:25; and Luke 1:68. cf. Notes on the New Testament, Luke 1:74: "here is the substance of the great promise, that we shall be always holy, always happy; that being delivered from Satan and sin, and from every uneasy and unholy temper, we shall joyfully love and serve God, in every thought, word, and work."

[60] Ibid.

> So long as faith subsists, we remain in peace; our heart stands fast, while it believes in the Lord. But if we let go our faith, our filial confidence in a loving, pardoning God, our peace is at an end, the very foundation on which it stood being overthrown.[61]

Satan's attack must be used as a means of growth! As often as the believer is reminded of his sinfulness let him remember that God has promised to deliver him from all his sin:

> By this means, the greater that change is which remains to be wrought in your soul, the more you may triumph in the Lord, and rejoice in the God of your salvation, who hath done so great things in you already, and will do so much greater things than these.[62]

Wesley urges the believer to trust God for all his holiness. Thus when Satan attacks him for his lack of holiness he can pin his hopes not on inherent holiness but on the righteousness of God:

> O bind this about your neck: write it upon the table of thy heart. Wear it as a bracelet upon thy arm, as frontlets between thine eyes: 'I am justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.' Value and esteem, more and more, that precious truth, 'By grace we are saved through faith.'[63]

The believer is further urged to keep in mind and to declare with confidence: "'I have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous'; and, 'the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved and gave Himself for me.'"[64]

Faith, therefore, is the one indispensable condition through which man is being saved. At every step of the ordo salutis, whether it be justification, regeneration or sanctification, it is only through

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[61] Satan's Devices, S, Vol. II, pp. 192-196.

[62] Ibid., p. 200.

[63] Ibid., p. 201.

[64] Ibid., pp. 201-202.

faith in God's grace for sinful man, which is revealed in Jesus Christ that man is brought into fellowship with God.

Stages of Growth in the Christian Life

Regeneration is the event which initiates the process of sanctification. "From the time of our being born again, the gradual work of sanctification takes place."[65] The New Birth by its very character implies growth:

> He is born again of the Spirit unto a new life, which 'is hid with Christ in God.' And as a newborn babe he gladly received the ἄδολον , 'sincere milk of the word, and grows thereby'; going on in the might of the Lord his God, from faith to faith, from grace to grace, until at length, he come unto 'a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.'[66]

At the conclusion of his sermon on The New Birth Wesley urges his congregation to pray continually for the privilege and blessing of being born again. The concluding line of the prayer reads as follows: "And then let me daily 'grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.'"[67] This last is a quotation from II Peter and Wesley has a lengthy comment on this passage in his Notes on the New Testament:

> There may be, for a time, grace without growth; as there may be natural life without growth. But such sickly life, of soul or body, will end in death, and every day draw nigher to it . . . If the remaining evil of our fallen nature be not daily mortified, it will, like an evil humour in the body, destroy the whole man. The end and design of grace being purchased and bestowed on us, is to destroy the image of the earthly, and restore us to that of the heavenly.

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[65] The Scripture Way of Salvation, S, Vol. II, p. 447. cf. Letters, Vol. III, p. 360.

[66] Salvation by Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 45. cf. Notes on the New Testament, I Peter 2:2 and Ephes. 4:13.

[67] The New Birth, S, Vol. II, p. 243.

> And so far as it does this, it truly profits us; and also makes way for more of the heavenly gift, that we may at last be filled with all the fullness of God.[68]

The believer cannot stand still. He must either go forward or fall backward; he must either grow or die. God's gift of grace is available for the believer just so long as he appropriates it and responds to it in holy living. As the believer responds to grace he grows to maturity. Wesley, in his anxiety to nurture the young Christians in his Societies and to point them to God's higher purpose for them, sometimes speaks of grace in substantial terms. That this is not his intention, nor at the center of his theological understanding of grace is clear from his commentary on I John. The Epistle distinguishes between babes, young men and fathers in the faith.[69] Wesley takes over this threefold order and sees all three belonging within the family of God by virtue of the new birth. As a consequence his theology is relational rather than substantial and this is true of his understanding of grace as well. Believers who have recently started on the Christian way are like babies and:

> The faith of a babe in Christ is weak, generally mingled with doubts or fears; with doubts, whether he has not deceived himself; or fear, that he shall not endure to the end. In the same proportion as he grows in faith, he grows in holiness.[70]

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[68] Notes on the New Testament, II Peter 3:18. cf. On God's Vineyard, Works, Vol. VII, p. 205: "And, as, in the natural birth, a man is born at once, and then grows larger and stronger by degrees; so in the spiritual birth, a man is born at once, and then gradually increases in spiritual stature and strength."

[69] Ibid., I John 2:12.

[70] On Patience, Works, Vol. VI, p. 488f.

Believers who respond to God's grace as it is made available to them in the means of grace, leave their childish ways behind them and grow into young men: "To those whom he styles young men, St. John says, 'I have written unto you young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.'"[71]

But even the "young men" must continue to grow in grace and as they do they become Fathers:

> These are they to whom the Apostle John gives the venerable title of Fathers, who 'have known him that is from the beginning'; the eternal Three-One God. . . . And those who are fathers in Christ, generally, though I believe not always enjoy the plerophory, or 'full assurance, of hope.'[72]

Entire Sanctification[73]

The Christian life begins with the crisis of regeneration which takes place simultaneously with justification. This initial crisis is followed by a process of growth - a gradual sanctification. As the believer grows in grace he moves toward a further crisis, that is, Entire

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[71] The Discoveries of Faith, Works, Vol. VII, p. 237f. cf. Letters, Vol. VI, p. 129: "I 'sum up the experience' of persons, too, in order to form their general character. But in so doing this we take a different way of making our estimate. It may be you chiefly regard (as my brother does) the length of their experience. Now, this I make little account of; I measure the depth and breadth of it . . ."

[72] Ibid.

[73] Wesley was not consistent in the terms he employed in describing his doctrine. One of the main reasons for the confusion among his admirers and his foes alike arose out of his indiscriminate use of language to define perfection. Whether he speaks of "entire holiness," "Christian perfection," "perfect love," "having the mind of Christ," or "entire sanctification," he means the same thing.

Sanctification.[74] We do not propose to trace the development in Wesley's theology at this point. That such a development did take place is readily apparent from Wesley's tract to which we have already referred, namely, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.[75] Our purpose is to explicate Wesley's doctrine in his mature thought. It is essential for our purpose that we consider with some care Wesley's teaching on entire sanctification for it is an integral part of the gospel which he proclaimed as God's purpose for the believer.

We have seen that Wesley's fidelity to the "whole counsel of God" led him to insist that there is such a thing as perfection. That perfection is both essential and possible is for Wesley a fact that needs no discussion. What interests him as an itinerant evangelist and a pastor with oversight over thousands of Christians is what perfection is, who can attain unto it, and when. The earliest possible moment for perfection is after justification "for justified persons are to 'go on unto perfection.' (Heb. 6:1)."[76] Initially Wesley believed that the crisis of entire sanctification took place immediately before death. In later years Wesley still retained the belief that this was the case

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[74] In his Journal Wesley records part of a conversation which he had with Count Zinzendorf. The record is in Latin, "to spare the dead." In the course of the conversation Wesley attempts to express his disagreement with the Moravians. When he is pressed by Zinzendorf, Wesley declares: "Veritus sum, ne falsa docerent (1) De fine fidei nostrae (in hac vita) scil. Christiana perfectione." In other words, Wesley sees Christian Perfection as God's purpose for the believer. A purpose which can be realized in this life. Journal, Vol. II, p. 488ff, September, 1741.

[75] Works, Vol. XI, pp. 366-446. The fourth edition appeared in 1777 and was Wesley's definitive statement on Christian Perfection.

[76] Ibid., p. 441. Our exposition for the most part follows the outline which Wesley wrote in 1764.

for the vast majority of people: "As to the time, I believe this instant generally is the instant of death, the moment before the soul leaves the body."[77] But Wesley had been strongly influenced by the claims of many of the members in the societies, especially those in Otley, Yorkshire, and this led him to allow for exceptions to this general rule.[78]

Entire sanctification, whilst it follows a period of gradual sanctification which could be long or short, is always instantaneous: "As to the manner. I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by faith, by a simple act of faith, consequently in an instant."[79]

As late as 1789 Wesley reiterates this view: "Gradual sanctification may increase from the time you was justified; but free deliverance from sin, I believe, is always instantaneous, - at least, I never yet knew an exception."[80]

Wesley acknowledges that perfection is "not absolute,"[81] that "it does not make man infallible,"[82] that "the highest perfection which man can attain, till their spirits return to God, does not exclude ignorance and error and a thousand other nameless defects and infirmities."[83] Nevertheless, he persists in describing perfection as

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[77] Letters, Vol. V, p. 39. This letter was written to his brother Charles in 1767 and reveals Wesley's unnecessary preoccupation with the time-table of the believer's life.

[78] Ibid. "But I believe it may be ten, twenty, or forty years before." cf. Letters, Vol. III, p. 221.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Letters, Vol. VIII, p. 190.

[81] A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, Works, Vol. XI, p. 442.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., p. 374.

"salvation from sin."[84] Wesley is able to hold these two apparently contradictory view points in tension, because "nothing is sin, strictly speaking, but a voluntary transgression of a known law of God."[85] This definition is in accord with Wesley's Arminian stress on man's responsibility which enables him to hold that in the final analysis no man is condemned except for his own sin. If Wesley had held to his initial position that the moment of entire sanctification occurs immediately prior to death, the tension in his doctrine would not have arisen. However, two factors caused him to change his views. On the one hand, Scripture appeared to promise the possibility of perfection in this life and, on the other, a great number of people claimed that this promise was fulfilled in their lives.

Newton Flew has charged Wesley with an inadequate appreciation of the nature of sin.[86] If we take Wesley's definition of sin in isolation from the rest of his teaching, then the charge must be allowed to stand. But if we see his teaching at this point against the background of his entire thought, then the criticism levelled must be severely qualified.

Firstly, Wesley as we saw in the previous chapter, is in line with the Reformers in his acceptance of the doctrine of Original Sin. We also saw how this doctrine was of fundamental importance for his doctrine of salvation.

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[84] Ibid., p. 442.

[85] Letters, Vol. V, p. 322.

[86] R.N. Flew, The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology, (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 332f.

In the second place, it is difficult to believe that Wesley was unaware of the perniciousness and sublety of sin as we read his sermons On Sin in Believers and The Repentance of Believers. In these sermons in particular and in many other sermons in general Wesley shows a deep awareness of the sinister character of sin. So much so that even when man is engaged in works of piety and works of mercy his thoughts and actions are not free from "unholy mixtures."[87]

In the third place, Wesley taught that the moment of perfection is not only preceded by a gradual work, but "it is constantly preceded and followed by a gradual work."[88] This is a note sounded over and over by Wesley. In a somewhat surprising comment in his Notes on the New Testament Wesley understands that even Jesus grew in holiness; and if it is true for Him it follows that "though a man were pure, even as Christ was pure, still he would have room to increase in holiness. . . ."[89] Growing in grace is not to be regarded in any sense inferior to perfection for "those who are Fathers in Christ grow in grace by degrees, as well as the new-born babes."[90] In one place Wesley likens the beginning of the Christian life to that of a small grain of mustard seed which afterwards grows into a great tree:

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[87] S, Vol. II, p. 386f.

[88] Works, Vol. XI, p. 442.

[89] Notes on the New Testament, Luke 2:52. cf. Christian Perfection, Works, Vol. VI, p. 5f. "There is no perfection of degrees, as it is termed; none which does not admit of a continual increase. So that how much soever any man has attained, or in how high a degree soever he is perfect, he hath still need to 'grow in grace,' and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God his Saviour."

[90] A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 65.

> Till, in another instant, the heart is cleansed from all sin, and filled with pure love to God and man. But even that love increases more and more, till we 'grow up in all things into Him that is our Head, . . .'[91]

In his lengthy treatise on Original Sin Wesley states categorically: "Entire holiness does not exclude growth."[92]

In the fourth place, there is not a single moment in the Christian life when the believer has no need of Christ. Those for whom the possibility of perfection becomes an actuality feel a deeper sense of their need of Christ than anyone else. Consequently their constant prayer is:

> Every moment, Lord, I want
> The merit of thy death![93]

Wesley expresses the same thought more fully elsewhere:

> The holiest of men still need Christ, as their Prophet, as 'the light of the world.' For he does not give them light, but from moment to moment: the instant he withdraws, all is darkness. They still need Christ as their King; for God does not give them a stock of holiness. But unless they receive a supply every moment, nothing but unholiness would remain. They still need Christ as their Priest, to make atonement for their holy things. Even perfect holiness is acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ.[94]

Thus it is for Wesley that entire sanctification is never a state attained by man but is a gift from God which is "new every morning."

In the fifth place, it is possible to fall from grace even

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[91] On Working out our own Salvation, Works, Vol. VI, p. 509. cf. Works, Vol. VII, p. 237.

[92] The Doctrine of Original Sin, Works, Vol. IX, p. 329.

[93] Works, Vol. XI, p. 443.

[94] Ibid., p. 417.

subsequent to the crisis of perfection! "Two things are certain: the one, that it is possible to lose even the pure love of God; the other, that it is not necessary."[95]

Wesley's position is once again grounded on Scripture: "I cannot perceive any state mentioned in Scripture from which we not, in a measure at least, fall."[96] And on experience: "Q. Can they fall from it? A. I am well assured they can. Matter of fact puts this beyond dispute."[97]

In the sixth place, Wesley issued far-reaching warnings to those who professed entire sanctification. In 1762 two of Wesley's leaders rebelled against his teaching on Christian Perfection and in attempt to refute the "enthusiasm" of these and other like-minded members who threatened to bring the whole Methodist cause into disrepute, Wesley published a tract entitled Cautions and Direction given to the Greatest Professors in the Methodist Societies.[98] There were six main directions or cautions listed by Wesley.

1. Believers are to be on their guard against pride. It is clear from Wesley's warning that we have operating here anything but an inadequate understanding of the nature of sin:

> If God has cast it out, see that it enters no more. It is as full as dangerous as desire. And you may slide back into it unawares, especially if you think you are in

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[95] Letters, Vol. V, pp. 188-189.

[96] Letters, Vol. IV, p. 167.

[97] Works, Vol. XI, p. 426. It is plain from the questions that followed that Wesley believed it was possible for those who did so fall to be restored.

[98] Ibid., pp. 427-435.

> no danger of it. . . . It is pride not only to ascribe what we have to ourselves, but to think we have what we really have not.[99]

2. Wesley delivers a strong blast against enthusiasm. Those who take their stand on vain imaginings and visions are exhorted to take Scripture as their guide and rule:

> You are in danger of enthusiasm every hour if you depart ever so little from Scripture - yea, or from the plain literal meaning of any text taken in connection with the context.[100]

A further mark of enthusiasm is expecting the end without the means. The means of grace were given in order that the believer might grow in grace and should not be neglected even by those who claimed to be perfected in love. To leave off using the means of grace will result in a loss of holiness. The gift to follow after is the gift of humble, gentle, patient love which is infinitely superior to all visions, revelations, manifestations and everything else.

3. The third caution is similar to the second, namely Antinomianism:

> Beware of thinking, 'Because I have faith and love, I need not have so much holiness; because I pray always, therefore I need no set time for private prayer; because

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[99] Ibid. cf. Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, X, S, Vol. I, p. 519f. Here Wesley cautions against judging one another: "There is no station of life, nor any period of time, from the hour of our first repenting and believing the gospel, till we are made perfect in love, wherein this caution is not needful for every child of God. For occasions of judging can never be wanting; and the temptations to it are innumerable; many whereof are so artfully disguised, that we fall into the sin before we suspect any danger."

[100] Ibid. Wesley further exhorts his readers to refrain from despising reason, knowledge, or human learning.

I watch always, therefore I need no particular self-examination."[101]

4. Wesley cautions his readers to beware of the sins of omission indicating that sin is still a distinct possibility for those who are entirely sanctified. They are exhorted to "keep at the utmost distance from pious chit-chat and from religious gossiping,"[102] and to become involved in the suffering of the world, "do all the good you possibly can, to the bodies and souls of all men."[103]

5. That idolatry is an ever present threat is clear from Wesley's caution to "beware of desiring any thing but God."[104] Although Christ has delivered them from the servitude of the world it is still possible for their liberty to be lost by their desires for the things of this world:

> Be patterns to all, of denying yourselves, and taking up your cross daily. Let them see that you make no account of any pleasure which does not bring you nearer to God, nor regard any pain which does; that you simply aim at pleasing him, whether by doing or suffering. . . .[105]

6. The final caution is directed against the danger of schism. Believers must expect to be criticised and contradicted and should not respond by being touchy or condemnatory in return. Not only are they to avoid separating from those who differ from them but they must be careful to do nothing which may tempt others to leave them:

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[101] Ibid. We shall return to Wesley's ceaseless war on Antinomianism in the following chapter.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

> Be particularly careful in speaking of yourself. You may not indeed deny the work of God; but speak of it, when you are called thereto, in the most inoffensive manner possible. Avoid all magnificent, pompous words. Indeed you need give it no general name, neither 'perfection,' 'sanctification,' 'the second blessing,' nor the 'having attained.'[106]

It is clear that Wesley's understanding of the nature of sin goes beyond his oft-quoted definition. Wesley's major concern was not with definitions, names, labels, or tags. It was rather that all men should know the extent of God's grace. Negatively, this meant that man could be delivered from the bondage of sin. Positively it meant that God's purpose for the believer was that the relationship of love which existed before the fall should be restored. Wesley is at his finest when he describes sanctification or perfection in terms of love.

The Primacy of Love

We have said repeatedly that faith is central in Wesley's thought. Now we must acknowledge that for Wesley even the glory of faith must bow to the priority of love. The primacy of love is founded on Wesley's understanding of the Adamic perfection prior to the fall. Faith had no place before the fall because the relationship between God and man was one of love. It was only when love was overthrown at the fall that faith was introduced as a means whereby love may once again be supreme: "Faith itself, even Christian faith, the faith of God's elect, the faith of the operation of God, still is only the handmaid of love."[107]

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[106] Ibid.

[107] The Law Established Through Faith, II, S, Vol. II, p. 77f. cf. God's Love to Fallen Man, Works, Vol. VI, p. 234: "There could then have been no such thing as faith in God thus loving the world. . . . If Adam had not fallen." Also Letters, Vol. II, p. 75.

Faith had no place among the angels, nor in Paradise. Faith only came into existence after the fall:

> It was only when love was lost by sin, that faith was added, not for its own sake, - nor with any design that it should exist any longer until it had answered the end for which it was ordained, - namely, to restore man to the love from which he was fallen.[108]

Wesley's exaltation of love should not be interpreted as being at the expense of faith. Whilst love is the end inasmuch as it was the beginning, faith is still regarded by Wesley as the indispensable means to that end. "It does not follow, that love is all in such a sense as to supercede either faith or good works."[109] That Wesley's insistence on faith is not merely on the periphery of his thought is clear. Commenting on a passage in the New Testament he declares: "Your salvation is begun, and will be perfected, if ye continue in the faith."[110] Again: "The foundation is faith, - the end, love."[111] So dependent is love upon faith that "the loss of faith results in the loss of love: "They that are deprived of their faith, are deprived of the love of God also . . . and as their love of God is waxed cold, so is also their love of their neighbour."[112]

Holiness (that is, love) is only possible through faith: "Faith alone it is which effectually answers this end, as we learn from daily experience. For so long as we walk by faith, not by sight, we go

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[108] Ibid., p. 79.

[109] Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, IV, S, Vol. I, p. 391.

[110] Notes on the New Testament, I Cor. 15:2.

[111] Ibid., I Tim. 1:5.

[112] The Wilderness State, S, Vol. II, pp. 246-247. cf. S, Vol. II, p. 196.

swiftly on in the way of holiness."[113]

Faith Working by Love

On May 24, 1738, Wesley listened to Martin Luther's Preface to the Romans being read at the meeting-house in Aldersgate Street. Part of this Preface includes a definition of faith:

> O, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith; and so it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask whether there are good works to do, but before the question arises, it has already done them and is always at the doing of them. He who does not these works is a faithless man. He gropes and looks after faith and good works, and knows neither what faith is nor what good works are though he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works.[114]

Wesley's own understanding of faith is so close to this that we are surprised he does not make explicit reference to this passage when he defines faith. In all his stress upon good works and upon holiness as the goal of life Wesley was not attempting to add to faith but sought to give a richer interpretation of what faith is all about. He did this in an age where for the overwhelming majority of church members faith was no more than a formal acceptance of a body of teaching which had no relation to life. A favorite text, namely, Faith Working by Love,[115]

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[113] The Law Established Through Faith, II, S, Vol. II, p. 80. cf. Letters, Vol. II, pp. 61,65.

[114] The edition read at Aldersgate was almost certainly W.W.'s English translation of this work, which existed in editions of 1594 and 1632. cf. John T. McNeill, Luther at Aldersgate, (Vol. 164; London Quarterly and Holborn Review: 1939), p. 2001. For a modern English translation the reader is referred to The Philadelphia Edition edited by J. Pelikan and H.T. Lehmann, in 55 volumes.

[115] Notes on the New Testament, Gal. 5:6. In his comment Wesley interprets "faith working by love," as "all inward and outward holiness." cf. Letters, Vol. IV, p. 299: "I then saw in a stronger light than ever before that only one thing is needful, even faith that worketh by love of God and man, all inward and outward holiness."

helped Wesley to express what he meant by faith. This phrase occurs with almost monotonous regularity throughout Wesley's writings. If faith is at all genuine it reveals to the believer the magnitude of the love of God in Jesus Christ. This revelation calls forth the response of love for God and issues in works of piety. It further calls forth love for man and is marked by works of mercy. Spurious faith is by contrast not activated by love and is, as a consequence, barren of works. Faith which is not activated by love is "not properly faith, as a dead carcass is not a man."[116]

In the Preface to his Sermons Wesley observes that a primary purpose in his preaching is to guard against religion which is purely formal and to warn those "who know the religion of the heart, the faith which worketh by love, lest at any time they make void the law through faith. . . ."[117] Wesley admitting that he does have a "few favourite tenets,"[118] all of which can be summed up in one: "In Christ Jesus, (that, according to his gospel) neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love."[119] And upon this the whole of Christianity rests.

In 1760 Wesley wrote a letter in which he stated: "The fundamental doctrine of the people called Methodists is, whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the true faith; - the faith which works by love, . . ."[120]

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[116] Notes on the New Testament, James 2:14, 20.

[117] Preface to the Sermons, Works, Vol. V, p. 4.

[118] A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 67f. Wesley adds that these favorite tenets he has received from God.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Letters, Vol. IV, p. 110. cf. Ibid., p. 175.

In another letter Wesley refers once again to the raison d'etre of the Methodists: "We are called to propagate Bible religion through the land - that is, faith working by love, holy tempers and holy lives. Let us do it with all our might"![121] It is crucial that penitent sinners should be urged to put their faith in Jesus Christ "but at the same time we must take care to let all men know, we esteem no faith but that which worketh by love."[122] Grace is offered to all men "that believe with such a faith as, working by love, produces all obedience and holiness."[123] Wesley's well-known tolerance regarding opinions about secondary issues in religion and even modes of worship do not preclude him from regarding as of first importance whether a man's faith is energized by love. Wesley wants to know whether or not he does the will of God, whether or not he loves his neighbor, whether or not he shows his love by his works.[124]

The faith working by love is real religion because it is nothing other than the religion of Jesus Christ:

> O do not take anything less than this for the religion of Jesus Christ! Do not take part of it for the whole! What God hath joined together, put not asunder! Take no less for his religion, that the 'faith that worketh by love,' all inward and outward holiness.[125]

This is the character of that faith which is the temporary means to the end, which is love. As we attempt to probe the meaning

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[121] Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 291.

[122] Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, V, S, Vol. I, p. 409.

[123] The Law Established Through Faith, I, S, Vol. II, p. 66.

[124] Catholic Spirit, S, Vol. II, p. 136f.

[125] The End of Christ's Coming, Works, Vol. VII, pp. 276-277. cf. Works, Vol. VIII, p. 19; Letters, Vol. VII, p. 216.

of this love we shall see that faith is indeed the indispensable means without which the end cannot be realized nor maintained.

The Love of God

We have seen that faith is the temporary and indispensable means to restore man to the love from which he had fallen. "Love is the end, the sole end, of every dispensation of God, from the beginning of the world to the consummation of all things."[126] We have already noticed that Wesley defines holiness as "religion itself."[127] In the same tract he writes: "Religion we conceive to be no other than love; the love of God and of all mankind; the loving God 'with all our heart, and soul, and strength,' as having 'first loved us,' . . ."[128]

Thus we have a kind of sum: Holiness is the end; Holiness is religion itself; religion is love; therefore, holiness which is the end, is none other than love!

A Methodist, according to Wesley:

> Is one who has 'the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him'; One who 'loves the Lord his God with all his heart and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength.'[129]

This definition takes on a deeper significance when Wesley acknowledges that what he has been describing is no other than the "common fundamental principles of Christianity."[130] This is confirmed in the Minutes:

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[126] The Law Established Through Faith, II, S, Vol. II, p. 461f.

[127] Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 472.

[128] Ibid., p. 474. cf. On Patience, Works, Vol. VI, p. 488: "Love is the sum of the sanctified."

[129] The Character of a Methodist, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 341f.

[130] Ibid., p. 346.

Q.3. What is implied in being a perfect Christian?

A. The Loving the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our mind, and soul, and strength. (Deut. 6:5, 3:6; Ezek. 36:25-29.)[131]

Wesley defines the perfection which man can expect in this life as "the 'loving the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind.' This is the sum of Christian perfection: it is all comprised in that one word, Love."[132]

Wesley consistently reminds his congregations and his correspondents that God's command that they love Him wholeheartedly is, in fact, a promise that they will be able to do so. The indicative is contained within the imperative! "Thou wilt love the Lord thy God because He hath loved thee."[133] "When it is said, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . it is not only a direction what I shall do, but a promise of what God will do in me. . . ."[134]

Without the fulfillment of God's promise it would not be possible for man to love God. No one can love God except He is first redeemed through the blood of Christ.[135] No man loves God by nature.[136]

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[131] Minutes, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 279; Gal. 5:14.

[132] On Perfection, Works, Vol. VI, p. 413. cf. Works, Vol. VII, p. 237.

[133] Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, X, S, Vol. I, p. 531.

[134] Letters, Vol. II, p. 381. Not only is the way of love God's purpose for man, his eternal destiny is dependent upon his loving God and man. cf. Luke 10:27.

[135] Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, X, S, Vol. I, p. 531. Wesley also attributes man's ability to love God to the Spirit. Notes on the New Testament, I John 4:7 and S, Vol. I, p. 618.

[136] Original Sin, S, Vol. II, p. 217.

Despite its power reason cannot produce the love of God.[137] It is only as the eyes of the mind are opened by faith in Jesus Christ that man can see the love of God; and so long as his eyes are fixed on Christ he is constantly filled with the love of God.[138] Wesley sums it up with a quotation from I John which he uses on numerous occasions: "We love Him because He first loved us."[139]

Wesley, we recall, describes the love of God as "His darling, His reigning attribute."[140] Love is superior to everything else in heaven or upon the earth: "Here is the height, here is the depth, of Christian experience! 'God is love'; And he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."[141]

No analogy can be drawn between the love of God and the love of man. God's love stretches to the ends of the earth and though man should rebel as often as there are stars in the sky if he would return again unto the Lord, he will find mercy and pardon. Nevertheless, let no man presume on the love of God. The love of God of man is no license to sin but is offered to all men that they in turn might love Him with heart and soul and strength.[142]

In several sermons Wesley describes the character of the love required of man. The love of God is unlike the love which Adam had for God. The fall has changed man's love for God qualitatively and

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[137] The Case of Reason Considered, Works, Vol. VI, p. 358.

[138] Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, VIII, S, Vol. I, p. 476.

[139] Letters, Vol. VII, p. 378. cf. Works, Vol. VI, p. 187.

[140] Notes on the New Testament, I John 4:8.

[141] Letters, Vol. VI, p. 136.

[142] A Call to Backsliders, Works, Vol. VI, p. 519f.

quantitatively. Wesley grounds this assumption on his belief that "if Adam had not fallen Christ had not died."[143] Prior to the fall man might love God as Creator and Preserver but he could not have loved God as One who had not spared His only Son but gave Him up for the world. Man could have loved the Son as the image of God but not as one who suffered and died for the sins of the world. Man responds in accordance with God's love for man. If Adam had not fallen the greatest instance of God's love would not have been given. Therefore, man loves God more than Adam because he is the beneficiary of a greater love than was Adam.[144]

Man's love for God is the controlling center of his life and leads to continual rejoicing in God's salvation. His attitude is one of constant thankfulness. He views the world in perspective for he is crucified to the world and the world to him. To love God in this way is to cease from the worship of idols of all description and worship only God.[145] The love for God is the "first and great branch of Christian righteousness."[146] It leads man to trust God as the ground upon which he stands and out of whom he lives. The one who loves God hears God's Word and is obedient.[147]

The Love of Man

Wesley rarely discusses the love of God without also discussing

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[143] God's Love to Fallen Man, Works, Vol. VI, p. 233f.

[144] Ibid., p. 234.

[145] The Almost Christian, S, Vol. I, p. 62f. cf. Scriptural Christianity, S, Vol. I, p. 95f.

[146] The Way to the Kingdom, S, Vol. I, p. 151.

[147] Ibid., pp. 151-152. cf. The Marks of the New Birth, S, Vol. I, p. 292f.

the love of man. The order is always love of God and love of man. "None can love his neighbour as himself, unless he first love God."[148] But it is impossible to love God without also loving man.[149]

In the same way that man's love for God is deepened and increased on account of the fall, so too is man's love for his neighbour of a wider dimension for the same reason:

> If God so loved us, how ought we to love one another! But this motive to brotherly love had been totally wanting if Adam had not fallen. Consequently, we could not then have loved one another in so high a degree as we may now. Nor could there have been that height and depth in the command of our blessed Lord, 'As I have loved you, so love one another.'[150]

The character of man's love for his brother man is a derivative of God's love for man. As man is restored into the image of God he reflects God's love for man:

> They are merciful even as He is merciful. Their soul is all love. They are kind, benevolent, compassionate, tender-hearted; and that only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.[151]

Thus the fruit of man's love for God is his love of his neighbor. He who claims to love God and does not love his neighbor is a liar. This love is a disposition of the heart toward all men, even our enemies. It is an attitude which issues forth in active service. This love is limitless, even to the point of laying down our lives for the brethren.[152] Taking his cue from the thirteenth chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Wesley sees this love as longsuffering and kind, it is

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[148] Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, XI, S, Vol. I, p. 531.

[149] On Family Religion, Works, Vol. VII, p. 78.

[150] God's Love to Fallen Man, Works, Vol. VI, p. 235.

[151] Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, IX, S, Vol. I, p. 499.

[152] The Marks of the New Birth, S, Vol. I, p. 293.

without envy, never rash or hasty in judgment, etc., etc.[153] In a passage which is moving in its poignancy and concern, Wesley describes this love as the embracing of the neighbor:

> With the most tender good-will, the most earnest and cordial affection . . . thou shalt love him as thyself; with the same invariable thirst after his happiness in every kind; the same unwearied care to screen him from whatever might grieve or hurt either his soul or body.[154]

Wesley's congregations were urged to take as their example the One who went about doing good. To love the neighbor is to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, help the fatherless or stranger, visit and assist those that are sick or in prison.[155]

Wesley himself set his people an example in practical Christianity which was enviable in its breadth of concern for others. Whilst still at Oxford Wesley and his fellow members of the Holy Club spent a good deal of their time and money caring for prisoners, the sick, the widow and the orphan. In 1741 Wesley suggested a course of action to the United Society to alleviate the distress of their fellow members:

> I reminded the United Society that many of our brethren and sisters had not needful food; many were destitute of convenient clothing; many were out of business, and that without their own fault; and many sick and ready to perish: that I had done what in me lay to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to employ the poor, and to visit the sick; but was not, alone, sufficient for these things, and therefore desired all whose hearts were as my heart:
> 1. To bring what clothes each could spare, to be distributed among those that wanted most.

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[153] The Almost Christian, S, Vol. I, p. 62.

[154] The Way to the Kingdom, S, Vol. I, p. 152.

[155] Scriptural Christianity, S, Vol. I, p. 97.

2. To give weekly a penny, or what they could afford, for the relief of the poor and sick.[156]

In the Rules of the Society of the People Called Methodists which was drawn up in 1743 Methodists are urged to demonstrate their desire for salvation:

> By doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and as far as possible, to all men; To their bodies, of the ability that God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison; . . .[157]

That Wesley's understanding of this love for the needy and distressed is not confined to the individual but must seek to change the system which brings man to misery and despair can be illustrated by his attitude toward slavery. His publication, Thoughts upon Slavery, attacked slave traffic and appealed to slave-owners and all those participating in this practice to desist from their evil work.[158] Only a week before his death Wesley wrote to William Wilberforce supporting the latter's fight against this "execrable villainy",[159]

> Unless the divine power has raised you up to be as Athanasius contra mundum, I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy, which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name

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[156] Journal, Vol. II, pp. 453-454. cf. Journal, Vol. IV, p. 52: "On Friday and Saturday I visited as many more as I could. I found some in their cells under ground, others in their garrets, half-starved both with cold and hunger, added to weakness and pain. But I found not one of them unemployed who was able to crawl about the room. So wickedly, devilishly false is that common objection, 'They are poor only because they are idle'.

[157] Life and Times of John Wesley, Tyerman, Vol. I, p. 431.

[158] Works, Vol. XI, pp. 59-79.

[159] Letters, Vol. VIII, p. 265.

> of God, and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.[160]

A further dimension to this love for the neighbor is that love which longs to make known the love of God to those who know it not. It is a love which mourns over the sins of the world:

> They still mourn for the sins and miseries of mankind; they 'weep with them that weep.' They weep for them that weep not for themselves, for the sinners against their own souls. They mourn for the weakness and unfaithfulness of those that are, in some measure, saved from the sins. 'Who is weak, and they are not weak? Who is offended, and they burn not?'[161]

And again: "The more the love of God fills their hearts, the more tenderly will they be concerned for those who are still without God in the world, still dead in trespasses and sins."[162]

This love constrains the believer to such an extent that he loses his concern for his temporal advantage. So concerned is he to help others that he is unmindful of his own spiritual good:

> For while he is on the full stretch to save their souls from death, he, as it were, forgets himself. He does not think of himself, so long as that zeal for the glory of God swallows him up. Nay, at some times he may almost seem, through an excess of love, to give up himself, both his soul and his body;[163]

This is a far cry from the Wesley of 1725 and indeed beyond that date, where he was so desperately concerned to save his own soul even though it was in order that he may save others! Whilst Wesley

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[160] Ibid. cf. The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley, (London: 1868), p. xxii, "The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness."

[161] Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, I, S, Vol. I, p. 332.

[162] Ibid., II, S, Vol. I, p. 345.

[163] Ibid., p. 348.

does not draw the logical conclusion in so many words, it is reasonable to assume that he came to see that to glorify God is to lose oneself in ministering to others!

Holiness and Evangelism

Not only was holiness the end of Wesley's evangelism, but in some sense, holiness was also the means of evangelism! During a visit to Cornwall, Wesley recorded in his Journal:

> The more I converse with the believers in Cornwall, the more I am convinced that they have sustained great loss for want of hearing the doctrine of Christian Perfection clearly and strongly enforced. I see wherever this is not done, the believers grow dead and cold.[164]

That Wesley regarded the preaching of perfection indispensable for the continuance of the Revival is clear from the sustained exhortations to his preachers to that effect:

> Where Christian Perfection is not strongly and explicitly preached there is seldom any remarkable blessing from God, and consequently little addition to the Society and little life in the members of it. . . . Till you press the believers to expect full salvation now you must not look for any revival.[165]

A part of the work of the leaders and preachers is to urge believers to go on to perfection.[166] If this is done, believers will grow in grace, but if not, "they will grow flat and cold."[167] The want of preaching Christian Perfection not only stifles growth in grace but hinders the growth in the membership of the societies:

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[164] Journal, Vol. IV, p. 529; Vol. VI, p. 25.

[165] Letters, Vol. IV, p. 321.

[166] Ibid., Vol. VI, pp. 54, 59.

[167] Ibid., p. 66.

> Christian Perfection has been little insisted on; and wherever this is not done, be the preachers ever so eloquent, there is little increase, either in the number or the grace of the hearers.[168]

The preaching of perfection will effect for good, "the entire work of God."[169] On the other hand, "when this is neglected the whole work of God will languish."[170] With such seriousness did Wesley believe in the necessity of preaching perfection that in 1789 he wrote to Adam Clark with the instructions that "if we can prove that any of our leaders or local preachers either directly or indirectly speak against it, let him be a leader, or a preacher no longer."[171]

Wesley urged his preachers not only to exhort their congregations to follow after perfection, but to aspire after it themselves: "And what you preach to others you have particular need to apply to your own souls."[172] If the preacher wanted to be an effective instrument he should seek after perfection himself and exhort all believers to do likewise. The preacher's labor would only be rewarded as long as he followed this counsel.[173]

Union with God

Thus far we have concentrated on Wesley's teaching on Entire

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[168] Journal, Vol. V, p. 149; Letters, Vol. V, p. 312: "Everywhere strongly and explicitly preach perfection. Then your work will prosper."

[169] Letters, Vol. VI, p. 360. cf. Journal, Vol. VI, pp. 73, 120.

[170] Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 184.

[171] Ibid., p. 188.

[172] Ibid., p. 109.

[173] Ibid., p. 283.

Sanctification as the goal of the Christian's life. Strictly speaking, however, man's ultimate end is union with God. Holiness is the means to this end: "And what was the end of his creation? It was one, and no other, - that he might know, and love, and enjoy, and serve his great Creator to all eternity."[174]

Although God's original purpose for man was thwarted by the fall; through the redemption in Jesus Christ man is once again restored to the favor and image of God. "So that still the end of his life, the life of every man born into the world, is to know, love, and serve his great Creator."[175] We recall that union or communion with God is possible to some degree in this life - it is that quality of life which Wesley describes as love of God and love of man. Despite the richness of this life of love it is only a school for the life beyond. "Why were we sent into the world? For one sole end, and for no other, to prepare for eternity. For this alone we live."[176]

No matter the height and depth of our experience of God in this world, it is but a means to securing the greater glory. The wise man sees:

> . . . clearer than the light of the noon-day sun, that this is the end of man, to glorify Him who made him for Himself, and to love and enjoy Him for ever. And with equal clearness he sees the means to that end, to the enjoyment of God in glory; even now to know, to love, to imitate God, and to believe in Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.[177]

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[174] What is Man?, Works, Vol. VII, p. 229. cf. II Tim. 1:9.

[175] Ibid., p. 230.

[176] Ibid., p. 229.

[177] Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, XIII, S, Vol. II, p. 29f.

Union with God is not grounded on man's potential but on God's promise:

> We may yet farther observe, that every command in holy writ is only a covered promise. For by that solemn declaration, 'This is the covenant I will make after those days, saith the Lord: I will put My laws in your minds, and write them in your hearts,' God hath engaged to give whatsoever He commands.[178]

The God who justifieth and sanctifieth man will continue this work "till it issue in glory."[179] The order of salvation with which we have been concerned in the previous chapter as well as in this is all of a piece. Every part of this "grand design" must be kept intact in order that God's purpose might be realized. The process of salvation always presupposes the end. The end is in the beginning:

> God hath joined from the beginning, pardon, holiness, heaven. And why should man put them asunder? O beware of this! Let not one link of the golden chain be broken. 'God for Christ's sake hath forgiven me. He is now renewing me in His own image. Shortly He will make me meet for Himself, and take me to stand before His face.[180]

Wesley describes the eternal life towards which the believer is moving as the "unmixed state of holiness and happiness, far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in Paradise."[181] After describing what heaven will be like in language borrowed from the Book of Revelation, Wesley continues:

> As there will be no more death, and no more pain or sickness preparatory thereto; as there will be no more grieving for, or parting with, friends; so there will be no more sorrow or crying. Nay, but there will be a greater deliverance than

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[178] Ibid., V, S, Vol. I, p. 403.

[179] Phil. 1:6. cf. Heb. 10:36: "The promise of God is perfect love, or, eternal life."

[180] Satan's Devices, S, Vol. II, p. 202f.

[181] The New Creation, Works, Vol. VI, p. 296.

> all this; for there will be no more sin. And, to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him![182]

Union with God is not only grounded upon God's promise but also upon God's claim upon man:

> But is there not a God in the world? Doubtless there is: And it is 'He that hath made us, not we ourselves.' He made us gratuitously, of his own mere mercy; for we could merit nothing of him before we had a being . . . . But if he has made us, and given us all we have; if we owe all we are and have to him; then surely he has a right to all we are and have, - to all our love and obedience.[183]

God claims man not only in creation but also in redemption:

> He is the proprietor of all we are, and all we have; and that not only by right of creation, but of purchase; for He died for all and therefore 'died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them.'[184]

In response to God's claim upon man's total allegiance man ought to resolve:

> To live unto God; to render unto God the things which are God's, even all we are, and all we have; to glorify Him in our bodies, and in our spirits, with all the powers and all the strength of each; and to make his will our sole principle of action.[185]

To be claimed by a holy God is a call to be holy, for:

> Without holiness no man shall see the Lord, shall see the face of God in Glory. . . none shall live with God, but he that now lives to God; none shall enjoy the glory of God in heaven, but he that bears the image of God on earth.[186]

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[182] Ibid.

[183] The Deceitfulness of Man's Heart, Works, Vol. VII, p. 377f.

[184] Abridgement of Various Works, Works, Vol. XIV, pp. 271-272.

[185] Ibid.

[186] A Blow at the Root, Works, Vol. X, p. 364. cf. Works, Vol. VIII, p. 314.

Therefore, Wesley urges his hearers to:

> Remember! You were born for nothing else. You live for nothing else. Your life is continued to you upon earth, for no other purpose than this, that you may know, love, and serve God on earth, and enjoy him to all eternity. . . . you were created for this, and for no other purpose, by seeking and finding happiness in God on earth, to secure the glory of God in heaven.[187]

We have seen that, the end of evangelism is holiness. This overarching purpose of Wesley's entire mission is best summed up in his own words: "I have one point in view - to promote, so far as I am able, vital, practical religion; and by the grace of God to beget, preserve, and increase the life of God in the souls of men."[188]

There is a remarkable circularity in Wesley's theology. The end of holiness is evangelism, but the end of evangelism is holiness! Further, the preaching of holiness is a means of evangelism but the preaching of the gospel is that men may be holy!

We have seen too, that for Wesley religion itself is holiness. In calling men to be truly religious he summoned them to a way of life. This holy way of life is nothing other than the life of love so the end of evangelism is love! And when a man is possessed of this love he is constrained to invite all men to walk in this way of love. Not only the individual but the community which is founded on this love for God and man invites all men by the very nature of its life to share in this community. Evangelism, therefore, is making possible the coming into being of the Christian community! This love is not limited to the love of and love for God but it is at one and the same time love for neighbor. Evangelism for Wesley, was never a case of 'Get right with God and the

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[187] What is Man?, Works, Vol. VII, p. 230.

[188] Letters, Vol. III, p. 192.

social implications will take care of themselves' but 'You say you love God - are you feeding the hungry, caring for those in prison, ministering to the sick and those in need?' To put it in another way, Wesley's understanding of the life of faith as the life of love would enable him to stand with another Christian of another time who cried, "Only he who cries out for the Jews may also sing Gregorian (chant)."[189]

In Chapter II and in this chapter the essential content of Wesley's preaching and teaching have been laid out.

In the first place, Wesley was concerned with the main design of God's deed. In Creation, Providence and Redemption it is God who takes the iniative and declares Himself to be free for man. In the second place, Wesley is acutely aware of the shape of man's need and is insistent that this need is shared by all man and that man's impotency leaves him hopelessly trapped. He is not even aware of his desperate peril and can only be made aware of and delivered from his sleep of death by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Man is pardoned and redeemed from the guilt and depravity of sin through the obedient sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Man is justified through faith. Faith is never a work, but always a gift of the gracious God. The first word is grace and the last word is grace. Faith is man's Amen to God's grace in Jesus Christ. In the third place, Wesley is insistent that God's deed summons man into a new life and is at great pains to explicate the character of this new life. The goal of faith is holiness of heart and life. The purpose of God for the believer is that he should be holy. The new life is the holy

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[189] The Place of Bonhoeffer, ed. Martin E. Marty, (New York: Association Press, 1962), Chapter Two, Bonhoeffer's History, Church and World by Franklin H. Littell, p. 33. Quoted in Heinz Zahrnt, "Der Gefangene von Tegel," Sonntagsblatt, (April 10, 1955), No. 15, p. 1.

life and is summed up by Wesley as the love for God and man made possible by the dynamic of God's love for all mankind. The new way of holy love will call forth works of mercy and compassion towards all in distress of body, mind and spirit. It is the character of this new life which compels those who participate in it to share it with all men. This holy life of love is a foretaste of the life which will be enjoyed in eternity.

This, in brief summary, is the content of the Evangel in the theology and practice of John Wesley. These are the major notes sounded in his evangelistic endeavor which took him throughout the British Isles and lasted for over fifty years. The gospel, as witnessed to in Scripture carries with it its own urgency and this urgency was communicated to Wesley. This urgency drove him to a life time of evangelistic service.

However, Wesley did not exercise this ministry in a vacuum. He carried out his remarkably far reaching ministry over against several major prevailing theological movements and in the context of a church which seemed to have forgotten the gospel which called it into being. For an understanding of Wesley the evangelist it is essential to understand the theological and religious climate of his day. In proceeding to a study of Wesley as he sought to combat what he believed to be a short-circuiting of the work of God the evangelist it is hoped to illustrate the urgency of Wesley's evangelism and to indicate how the opposing theological view points and the general apathy of his own church intensified this sense of urgency.

PART III

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

CHAPTER IV

THE URGENCY OF THE GOSPEL

John Wesley's ministry is characterized by a deep sense of urgency. His aim, very early on, was to glorify God and he came to believe that the way to do so was to pursue holiness, in order that he may become part of God's reconciling force in the world. Once he was convinced of God's purpose for his life he followed holiness with single-minded zeal.

There is no doubt, however, that the events which took place in 1738 gave birth to an urgency which he had not known heretofore. An urgency which prompted him to sing with his brother:

> Outcasts of men, to you I call,
> Harlots and publicans and thieves!
> He spreads his arms to embrace you all;
> Sinners alone his grace receives;
> No need of him the righteous have;
> He came the lost to seek and save.[1]

Not only did he sing of 'harlots and publicans and thieves,' but he sought these out, and many more beside, to share with them the joyous news of God's love for sinful man. Wesley's urgency, however, did not stem from his temperament, nor his attempts to discover God's intention for his life, nor even his particular experience at Aldersgate on May 24, 1738. The gospel, by its very nature, imparts a sense of urgency to all who rightly hear. Wesley's sense of urgency is a testimony to his

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[1] Wesley Hymn Book, p. 35, stanza 4.

right hearing:

> The love of Christ doth me constrain
> To seek the wandering souls of men;
> With cries, entreaties, tears, to save,
> To snatch them from the gaping grave.[2]

This is to say that the primary source of Wesley's urgency is 'from above,' that is, in the movement of God toward man in Jesus Christ as witnessed to in Scripture. Wesley's urgency is not of his own making; it is his obedient response to the gospel, and his response is only made possible through the dynamic of God's grace in His Word. In the previous two chapters Wesley's understanding of the gospel is set out. His urgency is an imperfect, human reflection of the urgency of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

There is, however, another side to this urgency. There is what may be termed an urgency 'from below.' That is, an awareness of the need for the gospel in the human situation. But there is no temporal distinction between the urgency 'from above' and the urgency 'from below.' It is the gospel itself which frees man to be free for God and for man. Nevertheless the gospel always comes to man in a specific historical situation. Our concern is with the nature of evangelism in the theology and practice of John Wesley; therefore, our concern is also with the concrete situation in which Wesley heard and sought to make known the gospel.

Wesley's 'right hearing,' his sense of urgency, can best be illustrated over against the theological and spiritual climate of his day. The theological movements which brought sharp reaction from Wesley

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[2] Ibid., p. 124, stanza 3.

and afford vivid illustrations of his urgency include Deism, Calvinism, and Antinomianism, and these will be considered in that order. In addition, attention must be given to the general state of the Church of England in the eighteenth century, of which Wesley regarded himself as a minister until the day he died.

It has been stressed that Wesley's urgency was informed by the gospel itself. Our major purpose is to illustrate this urgency. However, it is probable that his urgency was heightened, deepened and sharpened as he reacted to the historical situation in which he felt called to do the work of an evangelist. This is not to infer that Wesley's urgency was an accident of controversy. Nor is this to suggest that Wesley added a dimension to the gospel which it does not possess in and of itself. It is to point to Wesley as one whose urgency was derived from the gospel itself and who declared this gospel with an urgent and passionate zeal in the belief that the gospel entrusted to the church was being distorted and neglected. We begin with a brief study of English Deism, and in particular, Wesley's reaction to this school of thought in the light of his understanding of a God active in history on behalf of man.

English Deism

The term Deism is "generally restricted to the system of natural religion which was first developed in England in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[3] In 1696 John Toland published

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[3] The Oxford University Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. F.L. Cross, (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 385

a book entitled, Christianity Not Mysterious.[4] Toland was one of the most influential representatives of Deism and Leslie Stephen describes the publication of his book as "the signal gun which brought on the general action."[5] Toland was strongly influenced by John Locke, a foremost defender of free inquiry and toleration in the late seventeenth century.[6] Although Locke was not a deist himself, he profoundly influenced later developments in this direction through his Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures, which was published in 1695. Locke asserted that the only secure basis of Christianity is its reasonableness, but he does so as a Christian believer. Toland, unlike Locke, will not allow for the revelation of truths which, in themselves, are beyond the compass of reason. He argues that neither God Himself, nor His revelation are above the comprehension of human reason. Concerning revelation he writes:

> This famous and admirable Doctrine is the undoubted Source of all the Absurdities that were seriously vented among Christians . . . this Doctrine is the known Refuge of some men, when they are at a loss in explaining any passage of the Word of God.[7]

Toland maintains that the so-called mysteries of Christianity are a result of the abuses introduced by converted Jews, who were

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[4] John Toland (1670-1722) was a Roman Catholic Irishman who became a Protestant at the age of sixteen. A graduate of Edinburgh he also studied at Leyden and Oxford.

[5] English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, (2 vols.; New York: Peter Smith, 1876), Vol. I, p. 105.

[6] John Locke (1632-1704) was educated at Westminster School and Christ Church, Oxford.

[7] Christianity Not Mysterious, Section II, Introduction. cf. John M. Creed and John S. Boys Smith, Religious Thought in the Eighteenth Century, illustrated from writers of the period, (Cambridge: University Press, 1934), pp. 17-18.

strongly attached to their rites and feasts, and even more so by the Gentiles who "were not a little scandaliz'd at the plain Dress of the Gospel, with the wonderful Facility of the Doctrines it contain'd, having been accustom'd all their lives to the pompous Worship and secret Mysteries of Deities without number."[8] The Clergy are also roundly condemned for encouraging the complexity of the Christian faith in order to keep the laity dependent upon them for the explication of the gospel.[9]

Anthony Collins was another prominent deist whose clever and sarcastic attacks also caused a flutter in the Christian dovecot.[10] In his Discourse of Freethinking (1713) he attempted a defense of the right to think freely. Strongly anti-clerical he charged that the authority of the Bible record was doubtful. In 1724 he published a second book, A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion, in which he argues that the literal fulfillment of the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the Messiah cannot be maintained. Collins' attack marked the shift in emphasis from the significance of reason alongside revelation, to the relative insignificance of revelation as a help in disclosing the fundamental truth whose basis is the law of nature, which is rationally discernable. The inference was that what the Church claimed to be revelation was actually in conflict with the truth disclosed in nature and therefore should be discarded in favor of that truth which is discoverable by reason.

Many other similar works appeared at this time. We need only

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[8] Ibid., Section III, Chapter 4.

[9] Ibid., Section II, Introduction.

[10] Anthony Collins (1676-1729) was educated at Eton and King's College, Cambridge.

refer to one in particular. In 1730 Matthew Tindal wrote a book entitled, Christianity as Old as the Creation.[11] Tindal's basic thesis is evident from the title of his book. It is a clear and strong statement of the deistic religion of nature and may be regarded as the culmination of the deistic movement. Any truth which might result from Christian revelation must be discoverable in nature and in every age. Tindal argued very forcibly that it was impossible that God should limit his revelation to those of the Christian faith and thus exclude the vast majority of mankind. Christian revelation was merely an illustration of the truth which can be discerned by reason in human life everywhere. "And consequently, a Republication, or Restoration of the Religion of Nature."[12] The religion of nature is the common element of all creeds.

What was at stake in the deistic controversy was the distinctive historic revelation in Jesus Christ. The deists attempted to establish a religion independent of a specific historical event and a religion which rested on a truth rationally discernible in the law of nature. The deists were not atheists. They believed in God insofar as order and reason implied an intelligent creation. But their God was an absentee God, a remote deity who could not intervene in the universe, whose prime cause he was. They denied that Jesus was the Son of God, but were prepared to acknowledge that he was a great teacher with an excellent code of morals. Nevertheless, this code could be found by everyone in the truth disclosed in nature, although they never explained

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[11] Matthew Tindal (1657-1733) was a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford which position he retained despite his deistic leanings.

[12] Christianity as Old as the Creation, Chapter 12. cf. Religious Thought in the Eighteenth Century, p. 34.

how this was possible. They accepted that the Bible had a degree of inspiration, but no more than many other inspiring books and thus denied any claim for its uniqueness.

Reactions to the deistic position were swift in coming forth. Joseph Butler was the chief exponent on behalf of orthodoxy.[13] In the main he attempted to maintain a place for revelation alongside natural religion. He argued, on rational grounds, that reason by itself was unable to lead man to truth. Insofar as the Church owed its very existence to the need for revelation as well as reason "the main effort of orthodox apologetics was therefore directed towards demonstrating that revelation was a necessary adjunct to natural religion, or at the lowest, not inconsistent with it."[14]

It was Butler's Analogy of Religion, published in 1736, which delivered the coup de grace to Deism. Butler freely concedes to the difficulties in the way of accepting Revealed religion but shows that they are no more formidable than those confronting the proponents of the Natural religion: "There are as many difficulties in natural as in revealed religion. Christianity is above our comprehension but so is Nature."[15]

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[13]Joseph Butler (1692-1752) Bishop of Durham during the last two years of his life was the son of a Presbyterian linen-draper of Wantage, and went to a dissenting academy with a view to the Presbyterian ministry. However, he changed his mind and entered Oriel College, Oxford in 1715. In 1738 he became Bishop of Bristol, and was also Dean of St. Paul's from 1740 - 1750.

[14]Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 76.

[15]Joseph Butler, Works, ed. by W.C. Gladstone, (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), Vol. I, p. 202.

Butler accepts as proved "that there is an intelligent Author of Nature"[16] and in his defense of Christianity he uses the traditional arguments from prophecy and miracles. Butler "sought to apply the method of science to religion and to show that this indicated, not the certainty of Christianity, but its probability - a probability as great as that of natural religions alleged proofs, which were, when properly examined, by no means as clear as deists thought."[17] Butler refers to probability "as the very Guide of Life."[18]

Substantially, Butler argued that the Christian believes in the God of nature, but as revealed in nature, and not in the God who is fashioned by mere a priori speculation. God, as revealed to man by the analogy of nature, is no different from the God revealed in the Bible. The difficulty, therefore, of orthodox argument disappears and the Church should be ready to endorse the appeal to reason without reservation. Further, the Christian religion affords that which is not discoverable by reason. It bears also a revelation of a particular dispensation of Providence made possible through the Son and the Holy Spirit which offers salvation to mankind, who are represented in Scripture to be in a state of damnation. Reason, therefore, reveals to man that God is the Governor of the world; but that Christ is the mediator between man and God, and the Holy Spirit our Guide and Sanctifier we hold upon the evidence of Revelation.[19]

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[16] Ibid., Introduction.

[17] Roland N. Stromberg, Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth Century England, (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 106.

[18] The Analogy of Religion, Introduction.

[19] Ibid., Part II, Chapter i and the Conclusion.

Destructively, Deism can be reckoned a success. Their pointed questions in the critical areas of the reliability of the Biblical record, the interpretation of Scripture and the uniqueness of Christ touched the Church on a tender spot and subsided only to return with increased force in later years. Constructively, Deism must be adjudged as having failed to establish a credible basis for natural religion without need for recourse to Christian revelation. "The force of Butler's argument is undeniable. Nature has its dark side. It is not that amiable power which fluent metaphysics constructed out of a priori guesses. The shallow optimism of the deists blinked the obvious facts."[20]

In the second place, there was the destructive critical analysis of the very conception of natural religion itself. The most prominent figure associated in this reaction was David Hume. Deism received a severe setback from Hume in his Natural History of Religion. It was Hume who destroyed the myth of the noble savage by pointing out that savages were by no means enlightened deists! Due largely to Hume's work:

> The 'universal religion of nature' which has always been the same, and must for ever be alike apprehended by the understanding of all mankind had become by mid-century, about as believable for advanced intellects as that God took Moses by the hand.[21]

At the same time that the latitudinarians were preaching the gospel of sweet reasonableness and David Hume and others were debunking Deism and Christianity, there arose a third reaction in the person of William Law. Law maintained against the champions of orthodoxy that

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[20] English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, p. 307.

[21] Stromberg, p. 67.

it was illegitimate to rely on reason to prove the case for Christianity. Law's alternative was a recourse to the witness of the spirit. He claimed that the best evidence for Christianity was the holy life.

John Wesley cannot really be fitted into any of the reactions to Deism which we have considered. Despite his debt to Law, Wesley had too much respect for reason to join in the flight from reason. Nor did he retreat into mysticism. We recall that one of his most important and effective works was a series of tracts addressed to Men of Reason.[22] When one of his opponents charged that "it is a fundamental principle in the Methodist School that all who come into it must renounce their reason,"[23] Wesley was aghast. His reply was very much to the point: "It is a fundamental principle with us that to renounce reason is to renounce religion, that religion and reason go hand in hand, and that all irrational religion is false religion."[24]

Wesley says of the Methodists, "we have but one point in view - to be altogether Christians, scriptural, rational Christians."[25]

A further instance of Wesley's high regard for reason can be seen in his criticism of Martin Luther. After a somewhat cursory reading

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[22] An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Works, Vol. VIII. This tract was first published in 1743 and was followed two years later by A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion which was in three sections. That Wesley's attempt to convince the deists of the truth of Christianity met with some measure of success is clear from an entry in his Journal: "I spent an hour with Mr. Lampe, who had been a Deist for many years, till it pleased God, by the Earnest Appeal, to bring him to a better mind." Journal, Vol. III, p. 226 (1745).

[23] Letters, Vol. V, p. 364.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p. 154.

of Luther's Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, Wesley recorded in his Journal:

> How does he . . . decry reason, right or wrong, as an irreconcilable enemy to the gospel of Christ! Whereas, what is reason (the faculty so called) but the power of apprehending, judging, and discovery? Which power is no more to be condemned in the gross, than seeing, hearing, or feeling.[26]

In his sermon, The Case of Reason Impartially Considered, Wesley offers a succinct treatment of the place of reason and its limitations in relation to the Christian faith. To those who would undervalue reason Wesley points out that reason is a gift of God which ought not to be despised. Reason can be of assistance to man, not only in the arts and sciences, in industry and government, but even in religion. "It can do exceeding much, both with regard to the foundation of it, and the superstructure."[27] Therefore, those who attempt to exclude reason out of religion are not doing God a service, but are, in effect, rejecting God's gift.[28]

To those who were inclined to overvalue reason Wesley points to the severe limitations of reason. Despite its powers reason cannot produce faith, hope, or love of God or man. Faith is a direct gift of

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[26] Journal, Vol. II, p. 467. cf. B.A. Gerrish, Grace and Reason, A Study of the theology of Luther, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), Introduction and Chapter I. Gerrish points out that Luther's statement on reason was ambivalent "alternatively heaping upon reason extravagant praise and unqualified opprobrium." p. 4. Gerrish shows that whilst Luther approved of Christian reason seeking understanding within the domain of divine revelation he strongly condemned the attempt of human reason to ascend from worldly wisdom into the divine realm of the gospel.

[27] The Case of Reason Impartially Considered, Works, Vol. VI, pp. 354-355.

[28] Ibid., p. 360.

God and it is only as man sees by faith the height and depth of God's love in Jesus Christ that he is enabled to love God and man in return.[29] Accordingly, Wesley entreats those who exalt reason to:

> Let reason do all that reason can: Employ it as far as it will go. But, at the same time, acknowledge it is utterly incapable of giving either, faith, or hope, or love; and, consequently, of producing either real virtue, or substantial happiness. Expect these from a higher source, even from the Father of the spirits of all flesh. Seek and receive them, not as your own acquisition, but as the gift of God.[30]

Wesley's acknowledgement of the absolute necessity for revelation is both implicit and explicit throughout his preaching and teaching. Man sees that "God was in Christ," not "by a chain of reasoning," but only because Christ "opens and enlightens the eyes of our understanding."[31] Wesley makes the same point even more strongly in another sermon:

> We had by nature, no knowledge of God, no acquaintance with him. . . . We could no more perceive him by our natural understanding, than we could see him with our eyes. For 'no one knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son willeth to reveal him. And no one knoweth the Son but the Father, and he to whom the Father revealeth him.'[32]

Against the deists Wesley argued for the acceptance of the Scriptures as divinely inspired. Wesley regarded the Bible as the indispensable witness to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. "The Scriptures are the touch-stone whereby Christians examine all, real or supposed, revelations."[33] In the Earnest Appeal Wesley acknowledges that one of

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., p. 360.

[31] The End of Christ's Coming, Works, Vol. VI, pp. 274-275.

[32] Original Sin, S, Vol. II, p. 216. cf. Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 179-198.

[33] Letters, Vol. II, p. 117. cf. On Enthusiasm, Works, Vol. V, p. 467f.

the basic differences between the deists and the Christians is that:

> We believe the Scripture to be of God. This you do not believe. And how do you defend yourselves against them who urge you with the guilt of unbelief? Do you not say, 'Every man must judge according to the light he has'? . . . According to the light we have, we cannot but believe the Scripture is of God; and while we believe this, we dare not turn aside from it, to the right hand, or to the left.[34]

Wesley is convinced that the rejection of the Bible as divinely inspired leads inexorably to the exaltation of reason as the highest gift of God: "They that are prejudiced against the Christian revelation, who do not receive the Scriptures as the oracles of God, almost universally run into this extreme; I have scarce known an exception."[35]

The deists denied a unique inspiration to the Scriptures. It has been noted elsewhere how large a part the Scriptures played in the formulating of Wesley's doctrine. In his running battle with the deists he consistently emphasized the uniqueness and authority of Scripture. The Bible is the primary source of Wesley's evangelistic message. In his controversy with Deism Wesley was urgent in his attempt to direct them to the good news which their creed excluded. He believed that the Scriptures witnessed to a God who was active in history and attempted to convince the deists accordingly. Wesley's concern is not to win an argument but to make possible the restoration of God's design for His creation.

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[34] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 6f: When questioned by a deist as to why he was giving up a promising and rewarding career in England in favor of going to convert savages in America, Wesley replied: "Sir, if the Bible is a lie, I am as very a madman as you can conceive. But if it be true, I am in my senses; I am neither a madman nor enthusiast." A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 110.

[35] The Case of Reason Impartially Considered, Works, Vol. VI, p. 351.

In Chapter II we noted the prominence of the doctrine of Original Sin in Wesley's thought. This was another issue between Christianity and Deism. In his reply to John Taylor's The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin Wesley describes it as "far more dangerous than open Deism itself."[36] Wesley continues: "I said, than open Deism: For I cannot look on this Scheme as any other than old Deism in a new dress; seeing it saps the very foundation of all revealed religion."[37]

Wesley leaves his readers in no doubt as to what this foundation is:

> If, therefore, we take away this foundation, that man is by nature foolish, and sinful, 'fallen short of the glorious image of God,' the Christian system falls at once; nor will it deserve so honourable appelation, as that of a 'cunningly devised fable.'[38]

It was a species of Deism, therefore, which called forth Wesley's tract on Original Sin. That man is by nature sinful is an essential part of the Wesleyan doctrine and accounts in part for his urgency. No man needs a physician if he is not sick. But what if man is sick and is ignorant thereof? What if man is sick unto death but is indifferent to his danger because his disease is denied? This was the situation as Wesley saw it. Man is by nature a sinner and the denial of this fact only accentuated his danger. It was imperative, therefore, that man should be told his true condition, that man should be warned of his danger, and that this should be done without delay. The denial of man's sinfulness by the deists increased in intensity the urgency with which Wesley proclaimed the gospel.

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[36] The Doctrine of Original Sin, Works, Vol. IX, p. 193f.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

We recall that the doctrine of the Atonement is central for Wesley. In his sinfulness man is pronounced guilty. Furthermore, he is bound by the power of sin. But through the obedient sacrifice of Jesus Christ man receives pardon and release. Deism, with its rejection of Scripture, its exaltation of reason, had no place for the Atonement. Wesley was right when he declared: "Give up the Atonement, and the Deists are agreed with us."[39]

Wesley's reaction to Deism was an urgent, passionate, proclamation of God's love for sinful man as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. Wesley proclaimed that God is, and that He is more than the Anima mundi; He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Man cannot discover God, but God in His mercy has chosen to reveal Himself in His Son. Scripture is the indispensable witness to this revelation. Therefore, God is neither indifferent, nor impotent. At every possible occasion, in various ways, Wesley declares to all who will hear - God has acted! Above all else He has shown Himself to be a God of Love whose purpose for man is that he should love God and his fellow man. There were times when Wesley attempted to discuss the case for Christianity calmly and dispassionately. But before long, Wesley the evangelist comes on to the scene, and the gospel is not discussed, it is proclaimed. This is evident in Wesley's various Appeals. It is also clearly demonstrated in his letter to Conyers Middleton.[40] In the first section of his letter Wesley is content to offer some incisive criticism of Middleton's writings. But towards the end of the letter Wesley turns to more concrete questions: "Who is

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[39] Letters, Vol. VI, p. 298.

[40] Conyers Middleton was born in 1683 and died in 1750. It is uncertain whether he was a Christian or a deist. He attempted to show that the Apostles of the first century did not claim miracles.

a Christian? What is real, genuine Christianity?"[41] However, he is not content to stop there and wants to know whether Middleton is in fact a Christian! Wesley's correspondent is urged to put aside mere opinions and to accept God's promise by faith.[42]

The Calvinist Controversy

In many important respects Wesley stands very close to the Reformers of the sixteenth century. In his consistent stress on Sola Gratia, his teaching on Original Sin, and his acceptance of the principle of justification by faith, Wesley is in a line with Martin Luther and John Calvin. Wesley explicitly acknowledges his link with the gospel preached by the Reformers: "My father did not die unacquainted with the faith of the gospel, of the primitive Christians, or of our first Reformers; the same which, by the grace of God, I preach, and which is just as new as Christianity."[43]

In 1765 Wesley noted in his Journal: "I think on Justification just as I have done any time these seven-and-twenty years, and just as Mr. Calvin does. In this respect I do not differ from him an hairs-breadth."[44] In the Minutes of Conference, Wesley reveals just how close he stood with Calvin:

Q.23. Wherein may we come to the very edge of Calvinism?

A. (1) In ascribing all good to the free grace of God.

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[41] Letters, Vol. II, p. 375f.

[42] Ibid., pp. 381, 385.

[43] Letters, Vol. II, p. 134.

[44] Journal, Vol. V, p. 116.

(2) In denying all natural free-will, and all power antecedent to grace. And
(3) In excluding all merit from man; even for what he has or does by the grace of God.[45]

Despite these points on which Wesley and Calvinism were in accord, there was one issue on which Wesley and Calvinism could not agree. The crux of the matter can be put in the form of a single question: Is God's grace a possibility for all, or for the elect alone? The Calvinists in eighteenth century England stated unequivocally that the grace of God was for the elect alone; the remainder are damned by the eternal decree of God.[46] Wesley, just as strongly, believed that the grace of God was offered to all men and fought the concept of a limited Atonement throughout his long ministry.

Moreover, Wesley was unhappy, not merely with the prospects of a limited Atonement, but with the whole Calvinistic apparatus of predestination as early as 1725. In July of that year he wrote to his mother:

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[45] Minutes of Some Late Conversations, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 285. (August 2, 1745).

[46] The controversy between Wesley and the Calvinists occurred in two stages. In the early days of his itinerant ministry Wesley's main opponents in this controversy were George Whitefield, the Countess of Huntingdon and Howell Harris of Wales. The second main stage of the controversy took place in the 1770's. The chief proponents for Calvinism during this time were Augustus Toplady and Rowland Hill. The Calvinists took their stand on a small section of Calvin's Institutes:

> By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, according, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or death. The Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book III, Chapter 21, Section 5.

> What, then, shall I say of Predestination? An everlasting purpose of God to deliver some from damnation does, I suppose, exclude all from that deliverance who are not chosen. And if it was inevitably decreed from eternity that such a determinate part of mankind should be saved, and none beside them, a vast majority of the world were only born to eternal death, without so much as a possibility of avoiding it. How is this consistent with either the Divine Justice or Mercy? Is it merciful to ordain a creature to everlasting misery? Is it just to punish man for crimes which he could not but commit? . . . that God should be the author of sin and injustice (which must, I think, be the consequence of maintaining this opinion) is a contradiction to the clearest ideas we have of the Divine nature and perfections.[47]

In 1733 he declared: "He is the propitiation for our sins, but not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."[48] Nevertheless, in 1739, Wesley records his preaching the possibility of universal salvation as though it were for the first time:

> While I was preaching at Newgate on these words, 'He that believeth hath everlasting life,' I was insensibly led, without any previous design, to declare strongly and explicitly that God willeth 'all men to be' thus 'saved'; and to pray that, 'if this were not the truth of God, He would not suffer the blind to go out of the way; but, if it were, He would bear witness to His word.'[49]

From this time on, and until his death, Wesley proclaimed God's offer of salvation to all men everywhere. It is to state the obvious to say that Wesley's belief in the universal love of God was one of the

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[47] Letters, Vol. I, pp. 22,23. Wesley's position over against Predestination so early on, is a further indication of how little change took place in his doctrine over the years.

[48] The Circumcision of the Heart, S, Vol. I, p. 270. In light of this, Rattenbury's point that one of the principal doctrines of discovery in 1738 was "God's unqualified love for all mankind," must be modified. cf. J. Ernest Rattenbury, Wesley's Legacy to the World, (London: Epworth Press, 1928), p. 92f.

[49] Journal, Vol. II, p. 184. cf. Letters, Vol. I, p. 303. It is clear from this letter that Predestination was already an issue of contention. For the sake of peace and unity Wesley refrained from preaching against Predestination. But without planning to do so, Wesley was constrained to declare that God's will was that all should be saved.

strongest factors which charged his evangelism. That there were those who denied the universality of God's offer of salvation gave wings to Wesley's message of Free Grace and an urgency which burned all the more fiercely.

Wesley's opposition to the "decretum horribile" influenced everything he did. In editing his Notes on the New Testament he came upon one comment which might be misinterpreted as lending support to the teaching of reprobation: "I therefore struck it out immediately; as I would willingly do whatsoever should appear to be anyway inconsistent with that grand principle, 'The Lord is loving to every man; and His mercy is over all His works.'"[50] In the Preface to his Notes on the Old Testament, Wesley warns his readers that he has deliberately removed all references to Particular Redemption which Matthew Henry (on whose Commentary his Notes were based) had included:

> May I apprehend what is extracted from Mr. Henry's work, may in some sense be more sound than the original. Understand me right: I mean more conformable to that glorious declaration, God willeth all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of his truth. . . . Nothing is recited here as written by him which he did not write. Neither is any construction put upon his words, different from his own. But what he wrote in favour of Particular Redemption, is totally left out. And of this I here give express notice to the reader once for all.[51]

The Arminian Magazine, which was sponsored by Wesley, was specifically designed "to defend Universal Redemption."[52] Wesley urged the Methodists to worship regularly in the Church of England. Nevertheless, "if the minister began . . . to preach the Absolute

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[50] Letters, Vol. III, p. 134.

[51] Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament, Preface, p. v, 1765.

[52] Letters, Vol. VI, p. 284.

Decrees . . . they should quietly and silently go out of the church, yet attend it again the next opportunity."[53]

It was Wesley's sermon on Free Grace which brought the controversy into the open. In this sermon Wesley asserts that God's grace is free in all, that is, no man can ever earn or deserve grace; it is a free gift of God in His Son, Jesus Christ. Moreover, God's grace is not only free in all, but also free for all. Wesley sums up his assessment of the Calvinist position as follows:

> Call it by whatever name you please, election, preterition, predestination, or reprobation, it comes in the end to the same thing. The sense of all is plainly this, - by virtue of an eternal, unchangeable, irresistible decree of God, one part of mankind are infallibly saved, and the rest infallibly damned; it being impossible that any of the former should be damned, or that any of the latter should be saved.[54]

In Wesley's view, the dangers of such a position are manifold. If salvation is so utterly predetermined then preaching not only loses its urgency, but is actually irrelevant! Furthermore, this position tends to thwart God's purpose for the believer, that is, that he should be holy. It stifles meekness and love, and discourages and dampens zeal for good works. Wesley could not appreciate that this doctrine had any comfort to offer. Calvinism according to Wesley not only threatens to overthrow the whole Christian Revelation, but it makes Revelation contradict itself.[55] Wesley never seems to have asked himself why Calvin, and indeed the Calvinists in his own time, put such extraordinary emphasis on preaching.

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[53] Letters, Vol. VII, p. 99.

[54] Free Grace, Works, Vol. VII, pp. 375-376. First preached in 1740.

[55] Ibid.

So strongly did Wesley feel toward this doctrine that he labels it blasphemous:

> And here I fix my foot. On this I join issue with every asserter of it. You represent God as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust. But you say you will prove it by Scripture. Hold! What will you prove by Scripture? that God is worse than the devil? It cannot be. Whatever that Scripture proves, it never can prove this; whatever its true meaning be, this cannot be its true meaning. . . . No Scripture can mean that God is not love, or that his mercy is not over all his works; that is, whatever it prove beside, no scripture can prove predestination.[56]

Despite the fierceness of Wesley's attack against Calvinism, it is relatively mild when compared to some of the hymns which his brother Charles wrote during the height of the controversy. Rattenbury includes a number of these hymns in his book, The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns.[57] We need refer to only one to illustrate the depths of passion which the Calvinist doctrine aroused in Charles' heart and mind:

> Whoe'er admits; my soul disowns
> The image of a torturing God,
> Well-pleased with human shrieks and groans,
> A fiend, a Moloch gorged with blood!
>
> Good God! That any child of Thine
> So horribly should think of Thee!
> Lo! all my hopes I here resign,
> If all may not find grace with me.[58]

It is highly probable that the weapons of irony and sarcasm employed by Charles were even more effective than the preaching and

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[56] Ibid., p. 383. Note that it is Scripture which informs Wesley's doctrine. Wesley quotes freely from the Old Testament. Also from the New Testament: John 7:37; Acts 17:30; James 1:5; II Peter 3:9; and I John 2:1 and 2. cf. Predestination Calmly Considered, Works, Vol. X, p. 210ff.

[57] (London: Epworth Press, 1941), p. 117f.

[58] Ibid.

prose of his brother John. It should not be thought, however, that the Wesleys were only negative in their reaction to Calvinism. We recall the primacy of love in John Wesley's thought. Time and time again John expresses in terms both positive and moving, his trust in the love of God for all men. His Journal constantly refers to his offering salvation to all. His sermons are crammed with references to the possibility of salvation for all. For example, in his sermon on Salvation by Faith, Wesley defends his preaching of righteousness which is of faith:

> It is the only comfortable one, it is 'very full of comfort,' to all self-destroyed, self-condemned sinners. That 'whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed: that the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him': here is comfort, high as heaven, stronger than death! What! Mercy for all? For Zaccaeus, a public robber? For Mary Magdalene, a common harlot? Methinks I hear one say, 'Then I, even I may hope for mercy'! And so thou mayest, thou afflicted one, whom none hath comforted! God will not cast out thy prayer. Nay, perhaps He may say the next hour, 'Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee'; so forgiven, that they shall reign over thee no more; yea, and that 'the Holy Spirit shall bear witness with thy spirit that thou art a child of God.' O glad tidings! tidings of great joy, which are sent unto all people![59]

Referring to the Sermon on the Mount, Wesley remarks:

> Nor was it only those multitudes who were with Him on the mount, to whom He now taught the way of salvation; but all the children of men; the whole race of mankind; the children that were yet unborn; all the generations to come, even to the end of the world, who should ever hear the words of this life.[60]

In 1790, a year before his death, Wesley proclaimed:

> The sum of all is this: The God of love is willing to save all the souls that he has made. This he has proclaimed to

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[59] Salvation by Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 49.

[60] Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, I, S, Vol. I, p. 318.

> to them in his word, together with the terms of salvation, revealed by the Son of his love, who gave his own life that they that believe in him might have everlasting life.[61]

Thousands must have heard this message of hope and joy and love sounding from the lips of John Wesley as he crossed, and re-crossed the British Isles. At least as many, and perhaps many more, must have rejoiced at the singing of Charles Wesley's great hymns of love. Of the many hymns written by Charles on the subject of universal salvation the following must surely rank as one of the finest:

> Father, whose everlasting love,
> Thy only Son for sinners gave,
> Whose grace to all did freely move,
> And sent Him down a world to save:
>
> Help us Thy mercy to extol,
> Immense, unfathom'd, unconfined;
> To praise the Lamb who died for all,
> The general Saviour of mankind.[62]

It is sometimes overlooked that Wesley had a fully developed doctrine of Predestination. Following Arminius, Wesley's doctrine included both Election and Reprobation:

> Yea, the decree is past; and so it was before the foundation of the world. But what decree? Even this; 'I will set before the sons of men life and death, blessing and cursing. And the soul that chooseth life shall live, as the soul that chooseth death shall die.' This decree, whereby 'whom God did foreknow, he did predestinate,' was indeed from everlasting; this, whereby all who suffer Christ to make them alive are 'elect according to the foreknowledge of God,' now standeth fast . . .[63]

In his sermon On Predestination Wesley is careful to emphasize that his doctrine is not grounded upon speculation but upon God's eternal decree:

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[61] The Wedding Garment, Works, Vol. VII, p. 317.

[62] Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley.

[63] Free Grace, Works, Vol. VII, p. 385.

> It is a plain undeniable fact, all who truly believe in the name of the Son of God do now 'receive the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls'; and this in virtue of the unchangeable, irreversible, irresistible decree of God, - 'He that believeth shall be saved'; 'he that believeth not, shall be damned.'[64]

In other words, election and reprobation are conditional. It is in accordance with God's will that all men everywhere should be saved. But man is not saved automatically; God has ordained that only those who believe will be saved.[65]

John Wesley's account of his Aldersgate experience in his Journal is so full that it is easy to forget that Charles Wesley also commented on what took place on May 24, 1738. His comment is very brief, but also very significant in light of the Wesleyan stress on Believing: "Toward ten my brother was brought in triumph by a troop of our friends, and declared, I believe."[66]

Equally significant is John Wesley's statement on how he came to preach Justification by Faith: "I believed, and therefore I spoke."[67] What did Wesley mean by believing? "To believe . . . is to have a clear sight of and confidence in the most High reconciled to me, through

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[64] Works, Vol. VI, p. 227. cf. Mark 16:16.

[65] Predestination Calmly Considered, Works, Vol. X, p. 210: "But I believe this election to be conditional, as well as the reprobation opposite thereto. I believe the eternal decree concerning both is expressed in these words; 'He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned.' And this decree, without doubt, God will not change, and man cannot resist. According to this, all true believers are in Scripture termed elect, as all who continue in unbelief are so long properly reprobates, that is, unapproved of God, and without discernment touching the things of the Spirit."

[66] Charles Wesley's Journal, Vol. I, p. 95. See also Henry Carter in The Methodist Heritage, (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), p. 160.

[67] A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 112.

the Son of His love."[68] Believing is equated with "having faith."[69] To believe is to say Amen to God's promise of salvation in Jesus Christ.[70]

Wesley is adamant that men must believe in order to be saved. The conditions of salvation are "repent and believe" and these must be met by man, for Christ does not repent nor believe for men.[71] Wesley acknowledges that the power to believe is of God, "but does He believe for me?"[72] The same thought is expressed elsewhere: "Undoubtedly faith is the work of God; and yet it is the duty of man to believe."[73]

Wesley's understanding of Election as conditional informed his preaching and contributed in a large measure to the life or death character of his evangelism. Everywhere he went Wesley entreated his congregations to "believe the Gospel."[74] He insists that it is impossible to serve God "unless we believe in Him."[75] He urges men to believe God's promises, to believe that God is able to fulfill His promises, to believe that God is willing to give what He has promised now![76] Wesley's urgency overcomes the limitations of the written word and the lapse of time: "O come quickly!

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[68] Letters, Vol. II, p. 381.

[69] Justification by Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 124. cf. The Way to the Kingdom, S, Vol. I, p. 159.

[70] Notes on the New Testament, II Cor. 1:20.

[71] Letters, Vol. III, p. 379.

[72] Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 220.

[73] Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 202.

[74] The Way to the Kingdom, S, Vol. I, p. 159.

[75] Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, IX, S, Vol. I, p. 498.

[76] On Patience, Works, Vol. VI, p. 492f.

Believe in the Lord Jesus, and then even thou, are reconciled to God!"[77] "Just as thou art, believe the gospel."[78]

Earlier we stressed that at the center of Wesley's thought is the Reformation principle of Sola Gratia. But, in light of Wesley's urgent and persistent insistance on the necessity of man's believing, what has happened to his doctrine of grace? That Wesley taught that man must believe is clear. But it is equally clear that Wesley taught that man is totally dependent upon the grace of God in order to believe. "No man can believe in Christ unless God give him the power."[79] A few years before he died Wesley explained what he meant when he urged a man to believe:

> When we urge any to believe, we mean, 'Accept that faith which God is now ready to give.' Indeed, believing is the act of man, but it is the gift of God. For no one ever did believe unless God gave him the power.[80]

In his sermon on The End of Christ's Coming, Wesley attributes man's ability to believe to the work of Christ: "The Son of God begins his work in man by enabling us to believe in him. He both opens and enlightens the eyes of our understanding."[81] It is, however, Wesley's doctrine of Prevenient Grace which enables him to urge men to believe without lapsing into a doctrine of works. "Salvation begins with what is usually termed . . . preventing grace."[82] Man by nature is dead in

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[77] Justification by Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 130.

[78] The Righteousness of Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 146. cf. Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, X, S, Vol. I, p. 531; On Patience, Works, Vol. VI, p. 491.

[79] Notes on the New Testament, John 6:44.

[80] Letters, Vol. VII, p. 362.

[81] Works, Vol. VI, p. 274.

[82] On Working Out Our Own Salvation, Works, Vol. VI, p. 509. cf. Letters, Vol. VI, p. 239.

sin. But God takes the initiative in awaking him from the sleep of death.[83] Man, awakened by Prevenient Grace, becomes aware of the wrath of God incurred by his sin. He seeks to be free from the chains of sin which bind him fast, but he is unable to move.[84] Any awareness that man may have of the enormity of his offense and the desperateness of his plight is a gift from God.[85] If we are convicted of sin and attempt to make amends, we do so "according to the measure of grace which we have received."[86] Thus it is by the grace of God that man is brought to the place of despair which in turn leads him to throw himself completely on the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. That is to say, man believes the good news of God's forgiveness in His Son Jesus Christ; and as we have just seen, no one can believe except by the power of God.

On the other hand, Wesley holds that the grace of God is resistible. It is the fact that grace is resistible which accounts for the fact that many do not believe. No man, according to Wesley, is without the possibility of believing. Therefore, if any man does not believe it is not because he cannot but because he will not.

Wesley's view of the resistibility of grace is based upon Scripture. The oracles of God are clear that God is not willing that any should perish:

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[83] The Means of Grace, S, Vol. I, pp. 257-258.

[84] The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption, S, Vol. I, pp. 187-189.

[85] The Way to the Kingdom, S, Vol. I, p. 157.

[86] A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 47.

> And they, Secondly, declare what is the cause why all men are not saved, namely, that they will not be saved: . . . And therefore are they without excuse; because God would save them, but they will not be saved: This is the condemnation, 'How often would I have gathered you together, and ye would not'! (Mt. 23:37)[87]

Prevenient Grace creates within man the possibility to respond. If, however, man remains passive and fails to respond to the working of grace, he continues in his sin. "So that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath."[88] Wesley attempted to hold in tension the principle of Sola Gratia and human responsibility. To the age-old question of what part God plays and what part man plays in salvation, Wesley consistently held that salvation is completely dependent upon the initiative of God. However, Wesley discerned from Scripture that God had ordained Election to be conditional: "He that believeth is saved, and he that believeth not is damned." Thus, those who hear the gospel and believe attribute their salvation entirely to the electing grace of God in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, those who hear the gospel and do not believe bring damnation upon themselves. This explains why Wesley was so concerned to proclaim the gospel to all. Man must hear the gospel in order that he may believe and receive the promise of salvation. Wesley takes the commission entrusted to the Church with deadly seriousness: "Our Lord speaks without any limitation or restriction."[89] As we shall see in the

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[87] Free Grace, Works, Vol. VII, p. 381. cf. On Predestination, Works, Vol. VI, pp. 229-230; Journal, Vol. VII, p. 67; Predestination Calmly Considered, Works, Vol. X, pp. 205; 358-361.

[88] On Working Out Our Own Salvation, Works, Vol. VI, p. 512.

[89] Notes on the New Testament, Mark 16:15. Wesley's note continues: "If, therefore, every creature in every age hath not heard it, either those who should have preached, or those who should have heard it, or both, made void the counsel of God herein." In other words, authentic preaching is not always heard; preaching is not always authentic.

following chapter, Wesley's insistence on itinerancy arose out of his belief in God's unlimited offer of salvation as seen in Christ's death for all. "It is a shame for any Methodist preacher to confine himself to one place. We are debtors to all the world. We are called to warn everyone, to exhort everyone, if by any means we may save some."[90] This also explains why Wesley fought so vigorously against the "decretum horribile," believing as he did that this doctrine limited God's offer of salvation. Notwithstanding the vigorous preaching of convinced Calvinists like George Whitefield, Wesley believed that if some are predestined to salvation and the remainder to damnation by an eternal, unchangeable decree, then evangelism has no place in the Church.

In Wesley's controversy with the Calvinists the urgency of his evangelism is clearly illustrated. As has been shown, he believed that the Calvinist position on Predestination was contrary to Scripture. He believed that Scripture witnessed to a salvation which was a possibility for all. That the main shape of God's deed was to restore the relationship of love between Himself and sinful man, and between man and man. He further understood Scripture to teach that man must hear the gospel in order to believe. Wesley believed himself called to proclaim to all men the love of God for all. This is the primary source of the urgency which characterized his evangelism. But there were those who did not believe as he did and limited God's love; and therefore, Wesley preached with an added passion and purpose:

> I take heaven and earth to record this day, that I set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. O choose life! The life of peace and love now; the life

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[90] Letters, Vol. VI, p. 3. cf. Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 237.

> of glory for ever! By the grace of God, now choose that better part which shall never be taken from you![91]

The Peril of Antinomianism

One of the gravest dangers inherent within Calvinism, according to Wesley, was Antinomianism. A corollary of the Calvinist doctrine of election was the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. If salvation was absolutely predetermined by God's election then salvation was out of the hands of the elect and rested entirely in the hands of the electing God. It followed that the elect's assurance of salvation was complete. As the elect they could not fall from grace. The perseverance of the elect was grounded on God's faithfulness and not man's fickleness. But Wesley could not appreciate even this aspect of the Calvinist doctrine. He believed that any comfort which might be associated with this doctrine was overshadowed by the dangers of presumption and complacency. In any event, Wesley believed that the Scriptures did not support the Perseverance of the Saints. For example, on the scriptural directive: "If ye keep my commands, ye shall abide in my love."[92] Wesley comments: "On these terms, and no other, ye shall remain the objects of my special affection."[93] On the possibility of the elect becoming reprobate, Wesley writes:

> This single text may give us a just notion of the scriptural doctrine of election and reprobation; and clearly shows us

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[91] The Important Question, Works, Vol. VI, p. 505. cf. The Wedding Garment, Works, Vol. VII, p. 317: "Choose holiness, by my grace; which is the way, the only way to everlasting life." Italics mine.

[92] John 15:10.

[93] Notes on the New Testament, John 15:10. See also his comment on verse 14.

> that particular persons are not in Holy Writ represented as elected absolutely and unconditionally to eternal life, or predestinated absolutely and unconditionally to eternal death; but that believers in general are elected to enjoy the Christian privileges on earth; which if they abuse, those very elect persons will become reprobate. St. Paul was certainly an elect person, if there ever was one; and yet he declares it was possible he himself might become a reprobate.[94]

At the conclusion of a tract on this subject, Wesley sums up his position:

> If the Scriptures are true, those who are Holy or righteous in the judgement of God himself; those who are endued with the faith that purifies the heart, that produces a good conscience; those who are grafted into the good olive-tree, the spiritual, invisible Church; those who are branches of the true vine, of whom Christ says, 'I am the vine, ye are the branches'; those who so effectually know Christ, as by that knowledge to have escaped the pollutions of the world; those who see the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and who have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, of the witness and of the fruits of the Spirit; those who live by faith in the Son of God; those who are santified by the blood of the covenant, may nevertheless so fall from God as to perish everlastingly.
>
> Therefore let him that standeth take heed lest he fall.[95]

It is clear from Wesley's writings in general, and his Journal in particular, that Antinomianism was a constant threat both within and without the Methodist Societies. Everywhere he travelled, Wesley found Antinomianism menacing the life and growth of the societies. In 1745 Wesley records the unsuccessful attempts of the Antinomians "to seduce those who were showing their faith by their works."[96] That the efforts of the Antinomians were not always unsuccessful is demonstrated

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[94] Ibid., I Cor. 9:27. cf. Letters, Vol. IV, p. 167: ". . . I cannot perceive any state mentioned in Scripture, from which we may not, in a measure at least, fall."

[95] Serious Thoughts Upon the Perseverance of the Saints, Works, Vol. X, p. 298. Italics mine.

[96] Journal, Vol. III, p. 181.

in a letter which Wesley received in 1751. "Although (glory be to God!) as a society we stand at least as clear of joining with the Beast as any other, yet we have not purged out all his leaven; the Antinomian spirit is not yet cast out."[97] In 1768 Wesley expressed his continued concern: "I dread every approach of Antinomianism. I have seen the fruit of it over the three kingdoms."[98] Six years later he notes: "But still the main flood in England seems to be Antinomianism. This has been a greater hindrance to the work of God than any or all other put together."[99]

In the Minutes of Conference, Antinomianism is defined as follows:

Q. 19. What is Antinomianism?

A. The doctrine which makes void the law through faith.

Q.20. What are the main pillars hereof?

A.(1.) That Christ abolished the moral law.
(2.) That therefore Christians are not obliged to observe it.
(3.) That one branch of Christian liberty is, liberty from obeying the commandments of God.
(4.) That it is bondage to do a thing because it is commanded, or forbear it because it is forbidden.
(5.) That a believer is not obliged to use the ordinances of God, or to do good works.
(6.) That a Preacher ought not to exhort to good works; not unbelievers, because it is hurtful, not believers, because it is needless.[100]

In the early stages of the Revival, Wesley's main antagonists

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[97] Ibid., p. 510. cf. Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 55-56.

[98] Letters, Vol. V, p. 91.

[99] Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 113.

[100] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 278 (June 25, 1744).

in this battle were the Moravians.[101] But as we have already indicated the battle was not confined to one particular group, nor one particular time. In the years that followed, Wesley had occasion to join issue even with those who had been his close fellow-workers for many years. Our concern is not to rehearse the history of the battle so much as it is to note what was at stake in the battle. We are concerned rather to highlight the essential teaching of the Antinomians and to set out Wesley's reaction to this teaching. In this way we hope to assess the contribution which the Antinomian controversy made to Wesley's proclamation of the gospel, and especially to note in what way, if any, this particular controversy added to the urgency of Wesley's evangelism.

There is an abundance of source material in Wesley in which he attempted to counter the peril of Antinomianism. In response to a request from Conference, Wesley, in 1745, wrote a tract entitled A Dialogue Between an Antinomian and His Friend.[102] This was followed by a second such Dialogue toward the end of the same year.[103] In 1749 Wesley wrote three sermons describing the nature and the use of the law in a further attempt to offset the inroads that the Antinomians

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[101] One whole section of Wesley's Journal deals with his controversy with the Moravians. Although the period covered is from November 1, 1739 to September 3, 1741, it was only published in June, 1744. Journal, Vol. II, pp. 309-500. The section is prefaced with an address to the Moravian Church. A unique feature of the Moravianism of this period was its stress on "stillness" as opposed to the ordinances of God. It was to refute this teaching that Wesley wrote his sermon on The Means of Grace. We shall return to this aspect of Moravianism in the following chapter.

[102] Works, Vol. X, pp. 266-276. In this battle Wesley was ably assisted by John Fletcher, Vicar of Madely, who in 1771, published the first of five Checks to Antinomianism.

[103] Ibid., pp. 276-284.

were making in the societies.[104] In 1762 Wesley wrote another tract in response to the dangerous teaching of men like Thomas Maxfield and George Bell. This tract bore the impressive title of A Blow at the Root; or Christ Stabbed in the House of His Friends.[105] Nevertheless, our study cannot be limited to this material. Wesley was so aware of the danger of Antinomianism that he constantly seeks to guard against it; consequently, his opposition to this teaching is found in all his works.

The Antinomians claimed that "believers have not any inherent righteousness in them. Our righteousness is nothing but the imputation of the righteousness of Christ."[106] Wesley, as we have already indicated in Chapter III, accepted and taught that righteousness was imputed in justification, but he further believed and taught that righteousness was imparted as well as imputed. Wesley never advocated that man's justification was dependent upon man's righteousness: "The thing, that we are justified merely for the sake of what Christ has done and suffered, I have constantly and earnestly maintained above four-and-thirty years."[107]

In his sermon, The Lord our Righteousness, Wesley sets forth in what sense he believes the righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers:

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[104] The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law, S, Vol. II, p. 37f; The Law Established Through Faith, I, S, Vol. II, p. 58f; The Law Established Through Faith, II, S, Vol. II, p. 72f.

[105] Works, Vol. X, pp. 364-369.

[106] A Dialogue Between an Antinomian and His Friend, Works, Vol. X, p. 430.

[107] Remarks on Mr. Hill's Farrago Double-Distilled, Works, Vol. X, p. 430.

> All believers are forgiven and accepted, not for the sake of anything in them, or of anything that ever was, that is, or ever can be done by them, but wholly and solely for the sake of what Christ hath done and suffered for them. . . . We are 'justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.' And this is not only the means of our obtaining the favour of God, but of our continuing therein. It is thus we come to God at first; it is by the same we come unto Him ever after.[108]

In the same sermon Wesley explains what he means by inherent righteousness:

> 'But do you not believe inherent righteousness?' Yes, in its proper place; not as the ground of our acceptance with God, but as the fruit of it; not in the place of imputed righteousness, but as a consequent upon it. That is, I believe God implants righteousness in every one to whom He has imputed it.[109]

Wesley disliked the term "imputed righteousness of Christ" for two reasons. In the first place, "it is not scriptural."[110] In the second place:

> It has done immense hurt, I have abundant proof that the frequent use of this unnecessary phrase, instead of 'furthering man's progress in vital holiness,' has made them satisfied without any holiness at all - yea, and encouraged them to work all uncleanness with greediness.[111]

This second point is sounded over and over again by Wesley:

> In the mean time, what we are afraid of is this: lest any should use the phrase, 'The righteousness of Christ,' or, 'The righteousness of Christ is imputed to me,' as a cover for his unrighteousness. We have known this done a thousand times. A man has been reproved, suppose, for drunkenness: 'Oh,' said he, 'I pretend to no righteousness of my own; Christ is my righteousness.'[112]

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[108] S, Vol. II, p. 430.

[109] Ibid., p. 433.

[110] Letters, Vol. III, p. 372. cf. Thoughts on the Imputed Righteousness of Christ, Works, Vol. X, p. 312f.

[111] Ibid.

[112] The Lord Our Righteousness, S, Vol. II, p. 438.

To conclude the second Dialogue, Wesley owns that he is determined to avoid the language commonly used by the Antinomians because it is dangerous both for those who use it and for those who hear it:

> To the speaker, as it has a peculiar tendency to puff him up, to engender pride; to make him exalt himself, (under pretence of exalting the grace of God,) and despise others: To the hearers, as it keeps many who are before our eyes from ever awaking out of the sleep of death; as it throws others again into that fatal slumber, who were just beginning to awake; as it stops many in the midst of their Christian course, and turns others clear out of the way; yea, and plunges not a few into all the wretchedness of unclean living.[113]

In other words, Antinomianism not only encourages unholy living but it actually hinders men from coming into the Christian life. Antinomianism is a direct threat to evangelism, because it distorts the Evangel and keeps some in the sleep of death and actually puts others to sleep again.

The belief that the believer is free from the law is the second point which characterized the teaching of the Antinomians. This is brought out very clearly in the first Dialogue. Responding to a question, the Antinomian claims to be free from "sin, and hell, and the devil, and the law."[114] The Antinomians stressed solafideism in such extreme fashion that the implication was that faith supercedes the necessity of holiness. This, in Wesley's opinion, is one way of making void the law through faith.[115] It seems that Wesley encountered various forms of this teaching:

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[113] A Dialogue Between an Antinomian and His Friend, Works, Vol. X, p. 284.

[114] Ibid., p. 270.

[115] The Law Established Through Faith, I, S, Vol. II, p. 65f.

> All those are drawn into this by-way who, if it be not their settled judgement that faith in Christ entirely sets aside the necessity of keeping His law; yet suppose, either, (1) That holiness is less necessary now than it was before Christ came; or, (2) That a less degree of it is necessary; or, (3) That it is less necessary to believers than to others.[116]

Wesley is firmly opposed to this teaching and his opposition is in evidence not only in those writings specially designed to offset this teaching, but in all his works:

> But above all these, in the highest rank of the enemies of the gospel of Christ are they who openly and explicitly 'judge the law' itself, and 'speak evil of the law'; who teach men to break (λύσαι , to dissolve, to loose, to untie, the obligation of) not one only, whether of the least or of the greatest, but all the commandments at a stroke; who teach, without any cover, in so many words, 'What did our Lord do with the law? He abolished it. There is but one duty, which is that of believing. All commands are unfit for our time.'[117]

Wesley acknowledges that Christ is the end of the law in some sense:

> So He is, 'for righteousness,' for justification, 'to every one that believeth.' Herein the law is at an end. It justifies none, but only brings them to Christ; who is also, in another respect, the end or scope of the law - the point at which it continually aims.[118]

Wesley's position is that whilst Christ is the end of all law, even the moral law, "as a means of procuring our justification,"[119] nevertheless, the law cannot be set aside:

> For it is still of unspeakable use, first, in convincing us of the sin that yet remains both in our hearts and lives, and thereby keeping us close to Christ, that His blood may

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[116] Ibid.

[117] Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, V, S, Vol. I, pp. 408-409.

[118] The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law, S, Vol. II, p. 54.

[119] Ibid.

> cleanse us every moment; secondly, in deriving strength from our Head into His living members, whereby He empowers them to do what His law commands; and thirdly, in confirming our hope of whatsoever it commands, and we have not yet attained, - of receiving grace upon grace, till we are in actual possession of the fullness of His promises.[120]

In other words, in Wesley's understanding, the law is not a hindrance to freedom or an unnecessary prop to man's salvation, but rather a means of grace. Thus the believer should delight in the law and accept the law with gratitude and praise, as a gift from the gracious God. Thus, the believer is not under the law in the sense of:

> (1) The being obliged to observe the ceremonial law: (2) The being obliged to conform to the whole Mosaic institution: (3) The being obliged to keep the whole moral law, as the condition of our acceptance with God: and, (4) The being under the wrath and curse of God; under sentence of eternal death; under a sense of guilt and condemnation, full of horror and slavish fear.[121]

Being free from the law in this sense the believer is now free to respond to the love of God. His obedience to God is not out of bondage to the commandments but the response of gratitude and love to the gracious love of God in Jesus Christ. "He obeys not from the motive of slavish fear, but on a nobler principle; namely, the grace of God ruling in his heart, and causing all his works to be wrought in love."[122] In sum, faith in Jesus Christ does not dispense with holiness, on the contrary, it produces holiness.

The doctrine of imputed righteousness to the exclusion of inherent righteousness and the belief that the believer is freed from the law left no place for holiness. Instead it led to excesses and extremes

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[120] Ibid.

[121] The Law Established Through Faith, I, S, Vol. II, p. 68.

[122] Ibid., p. 69. cf. Dialogue, Works, Vol. X, p. 281.

which is best illustrated in Wesley's recorded conversation with an Antinomian teacher:

Wesley:	Do you believe you have nothing to do with the law of God?
Antinomian:	I have not; I am not under the law: I live by faith.
Wesley:	Have you, as living by faith, a right to everything in the world?
Antinomian:	I have; all is mine, since Christ is mine.
Wesley:	May you, then, take anything you will anywhere? Suppose out of a shop, without the consent or knowledge of the owner?
Antinomian:	I may, if I want it; for it is mine. Only I will not give offence.
Wesley:	Have you also a right to all the women in the world?
Antinomian:	Yes, if they consent.
Wesley:	And is not that a sin?
Antinomian:	Yes, to him that thinks it is a sin; but not to those whose hearts are free.[123]

Antinomianism made mockery of the scriptural teaching that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."[124] It not only discouraged personal holiness, or good works, it "makes men afraid of personal holiness, afraid of cherishing any thought of it, or motion toward it, lest they should deny the faith, and reject Christ and his righteousness."[125] So strongly does Wesley feel toward this teaching that he likens those who follow after Antinomianism to Judas, the betrayer of Christ: "O when will ye understand, that to oppose either inward or outward holiness, under colour of exalting Christ, is directly to act the part of Judas, to 'betray the Son of man with a kiss?'"[126]

Wesley was one with the Antinomians when they insisted that man

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[123] Journal, Vol. III, pp. 237-238. Wesley comments: "Surely these are the first-born children of Satan"!

[124] A Blow at the Root, Works, Vol. X, p. 364.

[125] Ibid., p. 366.

[126] Ibid., pp. 367-368.

was justified by faith without the works of the law. Indeed Wesley believed that Antinomianism was the direct outcome of a reaction to those who insisted on justification by works:

> 'But are we not justified by faith, without the works of the law?' Undoubtedly we are; without the works either of the ceremonial or the moral law. And would to God all men were convinced of this! It would prevent innumerable evils; Antinomianism in particular: for, generally speaking, they are the Pharisees who make the Antinomians. Running into an extreme so palpably contrary to Scripture, they occasion others to run into the opposite one. These, seeking to be justified by works, affright those from allowing any place for them.[127]

The Conference of 1745 was fully aware of how close the gospel was to Antinomianism:

> Q.22. Does not the truth of the gospel lie very near both to Calvinism and to Antinomianism?
>
> A. Indeed it does; as it were, within a hair's breadth: So that it is altogether foolish and sinful, because we do not quite agree either with one or the other, to run from them as far as ever we can.[128]

But, as we have seen, he was equally alive to the dangers of Antinomianism. Therefore, he warned:

> We must take care to let all men know, we esteem no faith but that which worketh by love; and that we are not saved by faith, unless so far as we are delivered from the power as well as the guilt of sin. And when we say, 'Believe, and thou shalt be saved,' we do not mean, 'Believe, and thou shalt step from sin to heaven, without any holiness coming between; faith supplying the place of holiness'; but, 'Believe, and thou shalt be holy; believe in the Lord Jesus and thou shalt have peace and power together.'[129]

Therefore, he pleaded with those who had succumbed to the false teaching of the Antinomians:

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[127] The Law Established Through Faith, I, S, Vol. II, p. 66.

[128] Minutes of Conference, Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 284-285. cf. Letters, Vol. IV, p. 208.

[129] Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, S, Vol. I, p. 409.

> Honour Christ by obeying him with all your might, by serving him with all your strength. Glorify Christ by imitating Christ in all things . . . Trust in Christ, to live and reign in your heart . . . Let Christ do all. Let him that has done all for you, do all in you. Exalt Christ as a Prince to give repentance; a Saviour both to give remission of sins, and to create in you a new heart, to renew a right spirit within you. This is the gospel, the pure, genuine gospel; glad tidings of great salvation.[130]

Therefore, he insisted that:

> The great end of religion is, to renew our hearts in the image of God, to repair that total loss of righteousness and true holiness . . . all religion that does not answer this end is a poor farce, and a mere mockery of God, to the destruction of our own soul.[131]

In Chapter I it was shown that Wesley's search for holiness began as early as 1725 and that the end of holiness was evangelism. Elsewhere it has been shown that arising from Wesley's understanding of the gospel, he saw that the end of evangelism was holiness, and that this holiness is summed up as faith working by love. From very early on Wesley insisted that God's deed summons man into a new style of life. Therefore, it cannot be claimed that Wesley's persistent attempts to explicate the character of the holy life into which man is called, arose out of his controversy with the Antinomians. What can be claimed is that Wesley's running battle with those who made void the law is a further illustration of the urgency of his evangelism. God's purpose for man is that the relationship of love should be restored and this involved an active, loving responsibility for one's fellow men. Because Wesley believed that the Antinomians were teaching less than God's plan to restore His ultimate design he was compelled to define more thoroughly, and more

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[130] A Blow at the Root, Works, Vol. X, p. 369.

[131] Original Sin, S, Vol. II, p. 225.

exactly, the goal of the Christian faith which he had discerned from Scripture.

Furthermore, the fact that the proponents of Antinomianism were making serious inroads into the Societies and were a stumbling block to those who were not committed to the Christian faith made urgent his struggle against Antinomianism. Wesley's urgency is drawn from the Evangel itself but because he believed God's purposes were being thwarted his evangelism is reinforced and intensified.

The Renewal of the Church

Despite the highly unorthodox character of his ministry John Wesley was and remained an ordained minister of the Church of England. Although he was strongly criticized by many of fellow clergy and often earned the displeasure of his superiors there was never any question of his dismissal from the church. In face of growing pressures from a great number of his preachers and the people who joined his Societies who felt that the Methodists should separate from the Church of England, Wesley resisted to the very end. He never sought to leave his church and urged his fellow Anglicans to remain within the church.

Wesley did his work as an evangelist within the Church of England and saw his movement as an evangelical order within the established church. The quality and urgency of his evangelism can be demonstrated in his plea for the church to be renewed, in order that it may fulfill its appointed task. What was the general state of the Church of England in the life and times of John Wesley?

Toward the end of the last century there appeared an historical evaluation of the state of the Church of England in the eighteenth century which differed markedly in one respect from earlier treatments. Up to that

time historians had no good word to say for the Church of England in Wesley's time. In light of their research, Abbey and Overton concluded that the picture of utter degradation had been overdrawn: "Many as were the shortcomings of the English Church in this period, her condition was not so bad as has been represented."[132] Since this time other scholars have supported this more moderate view. The picture remained a dark one but there were glimmerings of light. It was agreed that the Church was sick, but it was not dead. Perhaps the most impartial and informative of the histories which have been written in recent years is the work of Dr. Norman Sykes. In 1934 he published a book entitled, Church and State in England in the Eighteenth Century, in which he showed that under extremely difficult and trying circumstances the Georgian Bishops laboured with a great deal of diligence and faithfulness.[133]

However, even this more balanced estimate of the condition of the Church of England in the eighteenth century does not obscure the fact that the Church lacked the resources to withstand the pressures of an age when faith and morality were conspicuous by their absence. We noticed in our discussion on Deism that although the Church apologists were successful in refuting the deist position they did so by using the same weapons employed by the deists, namely, rational argument. The Enlightenment which produced Deism also produced the spirit of latitudinarianism within the Church which prevented the Church taking a radical stance over against the society.

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[132] C.J. Abbey and J.H. Overton, The English Church in the Eighteenth Century, (2 vols.; London: 1886), p. 279.

[133] Norman Sykes, Church and State in England in the Eighteenth Century, (Cambridge: 1934), pp. 144-145. cf. Man Versus Society in Eighteenth Century Britain, ed. J.L. Clifford, (Cambridge: University Press, 1968), especially Chapter Three, pp. 54-69.

One of the worst features of the Established Church in eighteenth century England was pluralism, a legacy of the Middle Ages:

> The visitation returns of Archbishop Herring of York in 1743 reveal that out of the eight hundred and thirty-six parishes which made reply, three hundred and ninety-three had no resident incumbents. Of the seven hundred and eleven clergy, no less than three hundred and thirty-five were pluralists.[134]

As a result of pluralism there were scores of villages which were denied regular services of worship or consistent pastoral visitation. It is to be expected that when the shepherd is absent the sheep will go astray. John Wesley, more than once, refers to the condition of the Church. Describing the situation prior to the Revival he inquires:

> Did you not frequently bewail, wherever your lot was cast, the general want of even outward religion? How few were seen at the public worship of God! how much fewer at the Lord's table! And was even this little flock zealous of good works, careful, as they had time, to do good to all men?[135]

After outlining the history of the Jewish nation, Wesley writes revealingly of the state of the Church in London:

> Does one-third of the inhabitants in any one parish throughout this great city constantly attend public prayer, and the ministry of his word, as of conscience towards God? Does one-tenth of those who acknowledge it is an institution of Christ duly attend the Lord's supper? Does a fiftieth part of the nominal members of the Church of England observe the fasts of the Church, or so much as the forty days of Lent, and all Fridays in the year? . . . What multitudes, even in this Christian city, do not attend any public worship at all? . . .[136]

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[134] A. Skevington-Wood, The Inextinguishable Blaze, (London: The Paternoster Press, 1960), p. 21, cf. An Address to the Clergy, Works, Vol. X, p. 497 where Wesley strongly condemns the practice of pluralism.

[135] An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 40f. By contrast everywhere one went one could witness "cursing, swearing, or profaneness, sabbath breaking, or drunkenness, quarrelling or brawling, revenge or obscenity."

[136] A Farther Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 149f.

In the final section of his Appeal Wesley begins with a consideration of the state of religion in England:

> Is there a nation under the sun which is so deeply fallen from the very first principles of all religion? . . . What multitudes are found throughout our land, who do not even profess any religion at all! And what numbers of those who profess much, confute their profession by their practice! yea, and perhaps by their exorbitant pride, vanity, covetousness, rapaciousness or oppression, cause the very name of religion to stink in the nostrils of many (otherwise) reasonable men![137]

Enough has been said to indicate what Wesley felt he was up against. It was to a Church characterized by formalism and indifference that Wesley sought to preach the gospel. It was to Church members who, in many cases, had succumbed to the worst kind of practical Antinomianism, that Wesley proclaimed the "whole counsel of God." It was to a Clergy who for the most part had capitulated to the general mood of moral decay and materialism which was so prevalent in Hanoverian England.

In this situation Wesley declared that he was not trying to destroy the Church, but to build it up again. His intention was to defend the Church from itself!

> Will ye say, (as the historian of Catiline,) Si sic pro patria! 'If this were done in defence of the Church, and not in order to undermine and destroy it'! That is the very proposition I undertake to prove, - that we are now defending the Church, even the Church of England, in opposition to all those who either secretly undermine or more openly attempt to destroy it.[138]

In contrast to the Reformers of the sixteenth century who separated from the Church and violently disagreed with the doctrine and discipline of the Church, Wesley submits that "we approve both the doctrines and discipline of our Church, and inveigh only against ungodliness and

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[137] Ibid., p. 201f.

[138] An Earnest Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 30.

unrighteousness."[139] This should not be taken to mean that Wesley was unconcerned with either doctrine or discipline. Rather, Wesley sought to call the Church back to the faith which was expressed in its doctrine and discipline. Wesley was one with the Reformers in their attempt to return to the faith of the New Testament. But he believed that the scriptural doctrines were incorporated in the Articles and Homilies of the Church of England. His fight was not with all of the doctrines of the Church of England, but with those who denied their heritage. Wesley's call to the Church of England was that it should possess its possessions. He appealed to the Church to claim its rich inheritance, and live as sons of God.[140]

In keeping with this position whenever Wesley was forced to defend himself against charges of destroying the Church, he invariably referred to the teachings of the Church. For example, quoting the Thirty-Nine Articles, Wesley lists the three ingredients necessary to a visible Church:

> First: Living Faith; without which, indeed, there can be no Church at all, neither visible nor invisible. Secondly: Preaching, and consequently hearing, the pure word of God,

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[139] A Farther Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 243f. In later years Wesley acknowledged that he was forced to differ with the Church of England on certain matters of discipline. cf. Journal, Vol. VII, p. 422.

[140] Journal, Vol. II, pp. 274-275. "A serious clergyman desired to know in what points we differed from the Church of England. I answered, 'To the best of my knowledge in none. The doctrines we preach are the doctrines of the Church of England; indeed, the fundamental doctrines of the Church, clearly laid down, both in her Prayers, Articles, and Homilies.'" Wesley adds that he only differs with that part of the clergy who dissent from the Church. In Chapter II it was noted that Wesley reduced the 39 Articles to 24 for the Methodist Church in America. To these the Conference added one making the 25 Articles of Religion.

> else that faith would languish and die. And, Thirdly, a due administration of the sacraments, - the ordinary means whereby God increaseth faith.[141]

Wesley claims that he cannot be accused of destroying the first mark of the Church because his definition of faith is taken straight out of the Homilies! "A sure trust and confidence in God, that through the merits of Christ my sins are forgiven, and I reconciled to the favour of God."[142] Wesley's point is that he and his helpers are calling men to this faith, the faith of the Church, so that he can hardly be accused of destroying the Church. In the second place, Wesley argues that he has never prevented any minister from preaching the gospel, and in the preaching of the Methodists more people than ever are hearing the gospel. Furthermore, a direct result of the Revival is the increase of attendance at the sacraments.[143]

When Wesley was forc[illegible] preaching of salvation by faith, he did so by provi[illegible] a doctrine which the Church described in it[illegible] strong rock and foundation of the Chr[illegible]ic that Wesley was denied the use of the [illegible]nd because he was preaching a doctrine wh[illegible]believe but had forgotten to preach. Tha[illegible] the Church against itself. Quoting extensively f[illegible], Articles, and Homilies, Wesley shows conclusively that the doctrine of justification by faith is none other than that held by the Church of England.[145] Wesley

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[141] An Earnest Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 31f.

[142] Ibid.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Salvation by Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 50.

[145] A Farther Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 51f.

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When Wesley was forced to defend his preaching of salvation by faith, he did so by proving that he was preaching a doctrine which the Church described in its Homily of Salvation as "the strong rock and foundation of the Christian religion."[144] It is ironic that Wesley was denied the use of the pulpits of the Church of England because he was preaching a doctrine which the Church professed to believe but had forgotten to preach. Thus Wesley seeks to defend the Church against itself. Quoting extensively from the Liturgy, Articles, and Homilies, Wesley shows conclusively that the doctrine of justification by faith is none other than that held by the Church of England.[145] Wesley

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[141] An Earnest Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 31f.

[142] Ibid.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Salvation by Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 50.

[145] A Farther Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 51f.

concludes:

> From the whole tenor than of her Liturgy, Articles, and Homilies, the doctrine of the Church of England appears to be this:-
> (1.) That no good work, properly so called, can go before justification.
> (2.) That no degree of true sanctification can be previous to it.
> (3.) That as the meritorious cause of justification is the life and death of Christ, so the condition of it is faith, faith alone. And
> (4.) That both inward and outward holiness are consequent on this faith, and are the ordinary, stated condition of final justification.[146]

Wesley's charges against the clergy are so extensive and occur with such frequency that it is impossible to list them all. However, in 1756 Wesley wrote An Address to the Clergy in which he included a summary of his major charges against his contemporaries.[147] After listing the gifts and graces which all ministers should possess (a list which would be an embarrassment to most modern ministers!), Wesley asks:

> As to his intention, both in undertaking this important office, and in executing every part of it, ought it not to be singly this, to glorify God, and to save souls from death? Is this not absolutely and indispensably necessary, before all and above all things?[148]

Unless a man feels "such an earnest concern for the glory of God, and such a thirst after the salvation of souls, that he is ready to do anything, to lose anything, or to suffer anything, rather than one should perish for whom Christ died,"[149] it would be better for that man to consider alternative employment. Elsewhere Wesley amplifies this

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[146] Ibid., pp. 55-56.

[147] Works, Vol. X, p. 480f.

[148] Ibid., p. 486.

[149] Ibid., p. 487.

fundamental requirement of the ministry:

> To 'seek and save that which is lost'; to bring souls from Satan to God; to instruct the ignorant; to reclaim the wicked; to convince the gainsayer; to direct their feet into the way of peace, and then keep them therein; to follow them step by step, lest they turn out of the way, and advise them in their doubts and temptations; to lift up them that fall; to refresh them that are faint; and to comfort the weak-hearted; to administer various helps, as the variety of occasions require, according to their several necessities: These are parts of our office; all this we have undertaken at the peril of our soul.[150]

Wesley's charge is that the clergy had lost sight of the real intention of the ministry and instead they reflected the materialistic spirit of the times:

> Do not therefore quibble and evade. This was not your motive of acting. It was not the desire of doing more good, whether to the souls or bodies of men; it was not the love of God: (You know it was not; your own conscience is as a thousand witnesses:) But it was 'the love of money,' and 'the desire of other things,' which animated you in this pursuit.[151]

Together with the love of money was the desire for preferment, the eye for the main chance, the ambition for a larger and more lucrative parish, rather than the desire to glorify God in the service of mankind:

> What a creature then is a covetous, an ambitious, a luxurious, an indolent, a diversion-loving Clergyman! Is it any wonder that infidelity should increase, where any of these are to be found? that many, comparing their spirit with their profession, should blaspheme that worthy name whereby they are called?[152]

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[150] A Farther Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 177f.

[151] An Address to the Clergy, Works, Vol. X, p. 496. On page 497 Wesley indicates his severe disapproval of the pluralism which was so rife in his day and which brought so much abuse in its wake.

[152] Ibid., pp. 491-499.

There were also those clergy who not only showed little awareness of the true function of the clergy, but indulged in immorality which resulted in the clergy being held in contempt, and therefore, ineffectual. "There are among yourselves ungodly and unholy men; openly, undeniably such; drunkards, gluttons, returners of evil for evil, liars, swearers, profaners of the day of the Lord."[153]

These are grave charges and it should be kept in mind that there were many gracious and faithful clergy who shone as lights in a dark world.[154] Wesley makes one further charge which caused perhaps even greater distress. Not only were the careless and immoral clergy a stumbling block by their very lives, but many of them opposed Wesley's mission and thereby hindered the Revival. That there were many clergy who with deliberate intent impeded those who sought to call men to repentance and forgiveness is beyond question. Wesley's Journal is replete with references to members of the clergy who organized mobs to break up his gatherings. Not only was the pulpit closed to him, in many instances the Church sought to prevent Wesley from preaching at all. Wesley's charge, therefore, is well-grounded:

> God begins a glorious work in our land. You set yourself against it with all your might, to prevent its beginning where it does not yet appear, and to destroy it wherever it does. In part you prevail. You keep many from hearing the

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[153] An Earnest Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 29f. Wesley offers proof of this charge from his own experience in Epworth. "A Clergyman, so drunk he can scarce stand or speak, may, in the presence of a thousand people, set upon another Clergyman of the same Church, both with abusive words and open violence. And what follows? Why, the one is still allowed to dispense the sacred signs of the body and blood of Christ: But the other is not allowed to receive them, - because he is a field Preacher."

[154] John Fletcher, Wesley's choice as his successor, is an obvious example.

> word that is able to save their souls. Others who had heard it, you induce to turn back from God, and to list under the devil's banner again. Then you make the success of your own wickedness an excuse for not acknowledging the work of God![155]

We note in passing that although most of Wesley's criticism was directed toward the clergy of the Church of England, he does make similar charges against the clergy of the other denominations.[156]

Wesley's criticism of the church was not confined to the clergy. He was fighting against a formalism and an indifference which pervaded the entire church. Wesley's war was against man's false understanding of religion. The understanding of religion which identified the Christian faith with "forms of worship, or rites and ceremonies."[157] False religion, or religion of the world, implied three things:

> (1) The doing no harm, the abstaining from outward sin; at least from such as is scandalous, as robbery, theft, common swearing, drunkenness:
> (2) The doing good, the relieving the poor; the being charitable, as it is called.
> (3) The using the means of grace: at least the going to church and to the Lord's supper. He in whom these three marks are found is termed by the world 'a religious man.'[158]

A refrain which runs throughout Wesley's writing is his insistence that to be a Christian involves "not only an assent to the Articles of our Creed, but also 'a true trust and confidence of the mercy of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.'"[159] Those who place their

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[155] A Farther Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 237f.

[156] Ibid., p. 180f.

[157] The Way to the Kingdom, S, Vol. I, p. 150.

[158] Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, II, S, Vol. I, pp. 343-344.

[159] Journal, Vol. II, p. 250.

trust merely in the externals of the faith "have the form of godliness, but not the power."[160] Wesley believed that the Apostles employed the phrase, salvation by faith, to refute those who were depending on their salvation because of their outward works. Wesley further believed that the same situation prevailed in his own day:

> And is not this persuasion as common now as it was in the time of the Apostles? . . . Does not every one of our Churches (to speak a sad truth) afford us abundant instances of those who are as negligent of internal holiness as either the Jews or ancient Gentiles were? And do not these at this day lay so great a stress on certain external rites, that, if they perform them according to the due forms of their respective communities, they doubt not but those works will render them acceptable to God?[161]

Drawing on his own experience Wesley illustrates the attitude he is refuting:

> Nearly allied to this is the 'gross superstition of those who think to put devotion upon God instead of honesty': I mean, who practice neither justice nor mercy, and yet hope to go to heaven because they go to church and sacrament. Can you find no such men in the Church of England? I find them in every street. Nine times out of ten, when I have told a tradesman, 'You have cheated me; sold me this for more than it is worth, which I think is a breach both of justice and mercy. Are you a Christian? Do you hope to go to heaven?' his answer, if he deigned any answer at all, has been to this effect: 'As good a Christian as yourself! Go to heaven! Yes, sure; for I keep my church as well as any man.'[162]

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[160] Ibid., p. 322.

[161] Letters, Vol. II, pp. 45-46. cf. An Earnest Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 18-19.

[162] Ibid., p. 72. Wesley was consistent in his criticism of those who trusted in the externals of religion, even when he found it within Methodism. In 1771 he wrote: "The most prevailing fault among the Methodists is to be too outward in religion. We are continually forgetting that the kingdom of God is within us, and that our fundamental principle is, We are saved by faith, producing all inward holiness, not by works, by any externals whatever." Letters, Vol. V, p. 289. Wesley's italics.

The religion which consisted only of the form without the power is no better than "the Turkish pilgrimages to Mecca, or the Popish worship of our Lady Loretto."[163] In sum, false religion is an idol, the most dangerous of all idols:

> If by the grace of God, we have avoided or forsaken all these idols, there is still one more dangerous than all the rest; that is religion. It will easily be conceived, I mean false religion; that is any religion which does not imply the giving the heart to God. Such is, First, a religion of opinions, or what is called orthodoxy. . . . Secondly, a religion of forms; of barely outward worship. . . . Thirdly, a religion of works; of seeking the favour of God by doing good to men. . . . In a word, a religion wherein 'God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself,' is not the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last point.[164]

The idol of false religion must be unveiled for what it is, and then is must be smashed. The best way to tear down an idol is to let the truth appear. Wesley's way of countering the false religion of his day was to proclaim what he believed to be scriptural Christianity. In the Preface to his Sermons he states his over-all purpose:

> I have endeavoured to describe the true, the scriptural, experimental religion, so as to omit nothing which is a real part thereof, and to add nothing thereto which is not. And herein it is more especially my desire, first, to guard those who are just setting their faces toward heaven . . . from formality, from mere outside religion, which has almost driven heart-religion out of the world.[165]

The expression "heart-religion" occurs with some frequency. True religion is "the religion of the heart."[166] Therefore, Wesley's readers are warned not to trust in "your being members of the visible

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[163] A Farther Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 202f.

[164] The Unity of the Divine Being, Works, Vol. VII, p. 269.

[165] Preface to the Sermons, S, Vol. I, p. 32.

[166] Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, XIII, S, Vol. II, p. 36.

Church, or in any external privileges whatsoever; for God now requires a change of heart, and that without delay."[167] But Wesley used many other phrases to describe scriptural Christianity. The way to the Kingdom is "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."[168]

Another definition strongly favored by Wesley is, the Christian is one who "has the mind of Christ."[169] But, "true religion always includes taking up the Cross."[170] We noticed in our last chapter that Wesley gave priority to love even over faith. This is further illustrated in the preeminent place given to love in his definition of true religion. A Christian is above all one who knows the love of God in Jesus Christ and responds in "the most absolute submission and the tenderest gratitude to his sovereign Benefactor."[171] The Christian's response to the love of God includes love for the neighbor, which is "not confined to one sect or party, not restrained to those who agree with him in opinions or in outward modes of worship, or to those who are allied to him by blood or recommended by nearness of place."[172] The only genuine religion is the "religion of love."[173] True faith is that faith "which worketh by love."[174] The sum of all religion is man's

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[167] Notes on the New Testament, Luke 3:8.

[168] The Way to the Kingdom, S, Vol. I, p. 151. cf. Letters, Vol. I, p. 217 (1737).

[169] A Farther Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 123. cf. Letters, Vol. III, p. 203.

[170] Notes on the New Testament, Acts 27:23. cf. I Cor. 4:21.

[171] Letters, Vol. II, p. 376.

[172] Ibid., p. 377.

[173] An Earnest Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 19.

[174] Ibid. cf. Letters, Vol. VII, p. 313.

response to God's love in Jesus Christ, "we love Him because He first loved us."[175]

Once again we have seen how the human situation influenced Wesley's evangelism. In the first place, the fire of Wesley's evangelism was fanned by his concern for those who were "posting to hell, and fancying it was heaven."[176] Wesley's evangelism was heightened as he sought to overcome the formalism which was so characteristic of clergy and laity alike. There were many good people whose concern for the outward outweighed their concern for the inward dimension of faith. Wesley had a special compassion for those who trusted in the works of piety and mercy to gain their entrances into the Kingdom. He had walked that way himself. The burden of Wesley's proclamation to those who possessed the form but lacked the power of holiness was the doctrine of justification by faith which he had received in 1738. In the second place, Wesley's urgency was intensified by those who claimed to be Christians, but whose lives belied their profession. These nominal Christians made no effort even to attend the means of grace or minister to the needs of others. Not only were they guilty of the sins of omission. Wesley charged them with immorality, drunkenness, and a host of other sins beside. Wesley was not only concerned that so many should be courting hell by their carelessness and indifference but he was indignant that their unholiness was a stumbling block in the way of those who were searching for God. Therefore, Wesley prays: "May the Lord, the God of the Christians, either reform these wretches, or take them away from the earth, that lay this grand stumbling block in the way

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[175] Notes on the New Testament, I John 4:19.

[176] An Earnest Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 19.

of those who desire to know the will of God."[177]

Wesley called on these nominal Christians to forsake their hypocritical way, to repent and believe the gospel. As always, he further insisted that the only faith which can be designated as Christian is the faith which works by love. Wesley, we have seen, was especially severe on the clergy. His severity is accounted for by his belief that the clergy must take the greater share of the responsibility for the formalism, the nominalism, the contradiction between faith and practice which very largely characterized the church. Wesley charged the clergy with being forgetful of the fundamentals of the faith and being preoccupied with mere opinions. One of the main reasons why the people had not responded to the gospel was because the clergy were simply not preaching the gospel. The sheep had gone astray, not of their own accord, but because the shepherd was not there to lead them.

The poor did not hear the gospel because the clergy, for the most part, were indifferent to their need. It was with this in mind that Charles Wesley wrote his hymn, "Jesus, Thy wand'ring sheep behold!",[178] and prayed that the great Shepherd would give the sheep "Pastors after Thine own heart."[179] That the church was held in contempt was the direct outcome of the unholy living of the clergy. Above all, the clergy incurred Wesley's wrath because they not only hindered the Revival by their indifference and bad example, they also deliberately set out to prevent the gospel being preached by Wesley and his helpers:

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[177] A Farther Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 197.

[178] Wesley Hymn Book, p. 121.

[179] Ibid.

> Why have not thousands more been reformed? Yea, for every one who is not turned to God, why are there not ten thousand? Because you and your associates laboured so heartily in the cause of hell; because you and they spared no pains either to prevent or to destroy the work of God![180]

In concluding this chapter it must be reiterated that Wesley's evangelism was primarily informed by his discernment of the gospel as it is found in Scripture. The urgency of Wesley's evangelism is derived from the gospel itself. He sought to proclaim what he believed to be the whole counsel of God.

On the other hand, Wesley was acutely aware of the human situation. Wesley believed implicitly that God had acted for the world in His Son Jesus Christ. But in face of the threat posed by Deism Wesley urgently resisted the idea of a God remote and unconcerned. When men exalted reason to the exclusion of grace, Wesley declared that man cannot discover God but that God in His mercy and grace had chosen to reveal Himself in Jesus Christ and pointed to the Scriptures as the indispensable witness to this fact. Wesley's understanding of the gospel led him to believe that God's salvation was a possibility for all men and he sought to make this known far and wide. But when the Calvinists preached that salvation was only for a select few, Wesley urgently counteracted this and with deliberate intent contradicted this limited concept and sought to draw all manner of men into the family of God. Wesley was one with the Reformers in their insistence on justification by faith, but when some men rose up and lauded <u>solafideism</u> to the exclusion of holiness, Wesley urgently proclaimed the character of the new life in Christ. He demanded not that works should be added to faith, but insisted that the

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[180] <u>A Farther Appeal</u>, <u>Works</u>, Vol. VIII, p. 238.

gospel itself declared that a faith which does not work by love is dead. In face of an indifferent, formal, and careless church, Wesley called men to a living, vital, scriptural Christianity. That God loves sinful man is good news. That sinful man is either unaware of this, or misunderstands this, or miscontrues this, gives the gospel a peculiar urgency.

The hungry sheep looked up but there was no shepherd to feed them. Wesley, as a faithful under shepherd, points men with compelling urgency to the Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep. Aware of God's compassion on the one hand, as witnessed to in Scripture, confirmed in the teachings of his church, and evidenced in his own life, and the hordes of people on the other, who were alienated from the care and compassion of God's love, Wesley is provoked to an urgency in his evangelism which has hardly been paralleled in the history of the Christian Church. Deeply aware of God's compassion and as deeply aware of the signs of need all around him Wesley sought to represent God's gracious caring for His world, and to stir up the church to be in very truth, the body of Christ, broken for a hungry world.

CHAPTER V

THE MEANS OF EVANGELISM

John Wesley would have agreed with Emil Brunner's statement regarding the importance of the means of evangelism. Brunner writes:

> What I should say to a man upon his death-bed is a holy matter; but it is a matter no less holy how I am to say it to him in such a way that he shall understand and appreciate it. A pastor might - to put it somewhat strongly go to heaven on account of the What but to Hell on account of the How. To despise the question of the How is a sign, not of theological seriousness but of theological intellectualism.[1]

It has been stressed repeatedly that for Wesley the Evangel is prior to evangelism. His primary concern was with the What of the gospel. However, this in no way limited his concern for the How. Indeed, his theological awareness reinforced it! This is to say that Wesley's understanding of the gospel informed the means of evangelism which he employed.

Wesley was urgently committed to the task of taking the main design of God's deed to all men and was, consequently, deeply interested in employing every appropriate means of fulfilling this task. Believing, as he did, that God's intention was to restore the relationship of love between Himself and man, Wesley recognized his responsibility to publish abroad this astounding truth. He believed that sinful man was aware

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[1] Emil Brunner, Natur und gnade, zum gesprach mit Karl Barth, (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1934), p. 31. This quotation is from the English translation by Peter Fraenkel under the title, Natural Theology, comprising "Nature and Grace" by Emil Brunner and the reply "No!" by Karl Barth, (London: Bles, 1946).

neither of his alienation from God nor of the fact of God's offer of forgiveness and freedom. Therefore, he sought ways and means to make this known as widely as possible. Wesley recognized as an essential ingredient in the evangelistic task the enabling of believers to live to the full the new life in Christ. Accordingly, he set about to make this a possibility by the employment of means informed by the gospel.

Because Wesley believed that for the larger part the Church was not fulfilling its responsibility of taking the gospel to the people, he sought the more urgently to discover ways and means to fulfill the explicit demand of Christ's commission to His Church. In considering the means of evangelism employed by Wesley it will become evident that he never worked on the basis of the end justifying the means. The What of Wesley's evangelism, informed his How.

Instituted Means

Wesley distinguished between the Instituted and the Prudential means of evangelism. The Instituted means are those instituted by God and witnessed to by the Scriptures, and are, therefore, indispensable. The Prudential means are those means which are called forth by the situation and are, therefore, subject to change. The Instituted means include the following: Prayer, searching the Scriptures, the Lord's Supper, fasting, and Christian conference.[2] Bearing in mind Wesley's emphasis on preaching, it is remarkable that preaching is omitted from the list of Instituted means. In 1734 Wesley published an extract of a tract on Christian Prudence:

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[2] Minutes of Conference, Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 322-324. Wesley distinguished between Instituted and Prudential means as early as 1731. cf. Letters, Vol. I, p. 86 and Ibid., p. 93.

> A Third Means of Religion appointed by God, is the hearing the Word preach'd. This is a standing Provision which God has made for the Edification of his Church; therefore a prudent Christian, who never thinks himself too wise to learn, or too good to be better, and who never omits any Means that may bring him nearer his End, is careful to pay his due Attendance to it, humbly waiting for the Grace and Blessing of God in the Use of his own Ordinance.[3]

It is not easy to account for the exclusion of preaching as an Instituted means. It is probabls that because of its centrality and primacy it is presupposed. Preaching is regarded as being so fundamental to the means of evangelism that it stands by itself. We recall that Wesley considered the Methodist preachers to be extraordinary messengers raised up of God, "the first principle of Methodism is wholly and solely to preach the gospel."[4] In 1784 Wesley revised the Thirty-nine Articles for use by the Methodists in North America. The first paragraph of the Article on the Church was retained intact:

> The visible Church is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached and the sacraments be duly administered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.[5]

In the previous chapter we noted that Wesley saw the Article calling for three things as being essential to a visible church. The second of these is "preaching, and consequently hearing, the pure Word of God."[6] There are several comments in Wesley's Notes which support the idea that the Church is called into being by the Word: "My sheep

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[3] A Treatise of Christian Prudence, Extracted from Mr. Norris by John Wesley, (Bristol: 1749), p. 21. Third Edition.

[4] The Ministerial Office, Works, Vol. VII, p. 277.

[5] The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America, (London: 1784), p. 310. cf. Journal, Vol. II, pp. 335-336.

[6] An Earnest Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 31.

are they who hear My voice by faith."[7] "Faith, indeed, ordinarily cometh by hearing; even by hearing the Word of God."[8] The Church is also sustained through the Word. "As the foundation sustains the building, so the Word of God, declared by the apostles and prophets, sustains the faith of all believers."[9] In one of his thirteen sermons preached on the Sermon on the Mount, Wesley refers to the places where God is to be found:

> But in a more especial manner they see God in His ordinances, Whether they appear in the great congregation, to 'pay Him the honour due unto His name,' or 'enter into their closets,' and there pour out their souls before their 'Father which is in secret'; whether they search the oracles of God, or hear the ambassadors of Christ proclaiming glad tidings of salvation; or, by eating of that bread, and drinking of that cup, 'show forth His death till He come' in the clouds of heaven, - in all these His appointed ways, they find such a near approach as cannot be expressed.[10]

The inclusion of preaching among the ordinances of God is repeated in Wesley's sermon on The Means of Grace, which we will consider in greater detail below:

> Every believer in Christ is deeply convinced that there is no merit but in Him; that there is no merit in any of his own works; not in uttering the prayer, or searching the Scripture, or hearing the Word of God, or eating of that bread and drinking of that cup.[11]

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[7] Notes on the New Testament, John 10:27-29.

[8] Ibid., Romans 10:17.

[9] Ibid., Ephesians 2:20.

[10] Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, III, S, Vol. I, p. 361.

[11] The Means of Grace, S, Vol. I, pp. 243-244. An added possible reason for Wesley not including preaching in the list of Instituted means is that in his controversy with the Moravians preaching was not an issue.

Wesley believed that although God is not limited to any special order by which He conveys His grace to man it is possible to discern a general pattern. God is free to use or refuse his appointed means of grace, though he normally chooses to use them. In most cases God encounters the sinner "by an awakening sermon or conversation,"[12] and this is, therefore, the best way of reaching the sinner with the gospel.[13]

Finally, when Wesley first published that part of his Journal which deals with his controversy with the Moravians, he included two hymns by his brother Charles. In the second of these hymns the proclamation of the Word and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper are singled out as the chief means of God's saving grace:

> His body doth the cure dispense,
> His garment is the ordinance
> In which He deigns to 'appear;
> The word, the prayer, the broken bread,
> Virtue from Him doth here proceed,
> And I shall find Him here.
>
> But now I seek to touch my Lord,
> To hear His whisper in the word,
> To feel His Spirit blow;
> To catch the love of which I read,
> To taste Him in the mystic bread,
> And all His sweetness know.[14]

The Proclamation of the Word

Wesley's chief means of extending the kingdom was by the proclamation of the Word. The reason why Wesley travelled the length and breadth of the British Isles to preach the gospel; the reason why he enlisted laymen and trained them as preachers, was his belief that the

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[12] Ibid., p. 257.

[13] Ibid., p. 258.

[14] The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley, collected and arranged by G. Osborn (London: 1869), Vol. IV, p. 451; The Bloody Issue Cured, Stanzas 7 and 10.

gospel was not being preached by the Church. Wesley sought to remedy the omission by preaching to the limit of his capacity, and by sending out lay-preachers into every part of the country. Wesley complained that many of the clergy did not preach at all, and those who did very often failed to preach the gospel. One prominent preacher affirmed: "First, that men in general (if not every individual) are very wise; Secondly, that men in general are very virtuous; and, Thirdly, that they are very happy."[15] Wesley concedes that there were a few who preached the gospel:

> But how are these in comparison of those (οι καπηλευοντες) who adulterate the word of God! How little wholesome food have we for our souls, and what abundance of poison! How few are there that, either in writing or preaching, declare the genuine gospel of Christ, in the simplicity and purity wherewith it is set forth in the venerable records of our own Church. And how are we inclosed on every side with those who, neither knowing the doctrines of our Church, nor the Scriptures, nor the power of God, have found out to themselves inventions wherewith they constantly corrupt others also![16]

Scattered throughout Wesley's writings are numerous hints and pieces of advice as to the best method of preaching. An avoidance of jargon is one piece of advice which he offers on more than one occasion. Wesley was determined to offer "plain truth for plain people."[17] He admits that his sermons are purposely devoid of "elaborate, elegant, or oratorical dress."[18] Wesley constantly strove after simplicity:

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[15] The Deceitfulness of Man's Heart, Works, Vol. VII, p. 336.

[16] True Christianity Defended, Works, Vol. VII, p. 454f. In the same sermon Wesley also criticizes the preaching of two leading preachers of the eighteenth century, namely, Tillotson and Bull.

[17] Preface, S, Vol. I, p. 30.

[18] Ibid., p. 29.

> One came to me by whom I used to profit much. But her conversation was now too high for me. It was far above out of my sight. My soul is sick of this sublime divinity. Let me think and speak as a little child!. Let my religion be plain, artless, simple! Meekness, temperance, patience, faith, and love, be these my highest gifts; and let the highest words wherein I teach them be those I learn from the book of God![19]

In 1778 Wesley tells us that he preached "with all possible plainness, both for the sake of three-score children, and of a large congregation of serious, attentive people."[20] John Telford recounts a story of the young Wesley which indicates the method used by Wesley in order to dispense with all unnecessary and difficult language:

> As a young man, he once preached a highly finished sermon to a country congregation. The people listened with open mouths. He saw at once that they did not understand what he said. He struck out some of the hard expressions, and tried again. Their mouths were now only half open. Wesley, however, was resolved to carry them entirely with him. He read the sermon to an intelligent servant, and got her to tell him whenever she did not understand. Betty's 'Stop, sir,' came so often that he grew impatient. But he persevered, wrote a plain word over every hard one, and had his reward in seeing that his congregation now clearly understood every word.[21]

Although this story has an apocryphal ring about it, it serves to illustrate what Wesley himself expresses. In several of his letters to Samuel Furly, Wesley exhorts his friend to aim always for simplicity of speaking and writing. In one letter Wesley comments on Dr. Middleton's style: "His diction is stiff, formal, affected, unnatural. The art glares, and therefore shocks a man of good taste."[22] Wesley recalls the

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[19] Journal, Vol. II, p. 328.

[20] Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 218.

[21] John Telford, The Life of John Wesley, (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1902), pp. 315-316.

[22] Letters, Vol. IV, p. 232.

time when he too used the language of an Oxford graduate and how he came to change:

> When I had been a member of the University about ten years, I wrote and talked much as you do now. But when I talked to plain people in the Castle or the town, I observed they gaped and stared. This quickly obliged me to alter my style and adopt the language of those I spoke to. And yet there is a dignity in this simplicity, which is not disagreeable to those of the highest rank.[23]

It is obvious that Wesley is not advocating a shallow, crude approach. Wesley pleads for an approach which is direct[24] and one which keeps in mind the people whom the preacher is addressing.[25] Above all, an approach which has a constant awareness of the end of preaching:

> You are a Christian minister speaking and writing to save souls. Have this end always in your eye, and you will never designedly use an hard word. Use all the sense, learning and fire you have; forgetting yourself, and remembering only these are the souls for whom Christ died.[26]

A model on which any preacher can form his style is that of the First Epistle of St. John: "Here are sublimity and simplicity together, the strongest sense and the plainest language! How can any one that would 'speak as the oracles of God' use harder words than are found here?"[27]

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[23] Ibid., p. 258.

[24] Notes on the New Testament, Acts 8:30. "He did not begin about the weather, news, or the like. In speaking for God, we may frequently come to the point at once, without circumlocution."

[25] Ibid., I Cor. 3:2. "So should every preacher suit his doctrine to his hearers." cf. Wesley advised his preachers "to always suit your subject to your audience." Works, Vol. VIII, p. 317.

[26] Letters, Vol. IV, p. 258.

[27] Journal, Vol. V, p. 137. cf. Preface to Sermons published originally in four volumes, (1788), Works, Vol. VI, p. 185: "Only let his language be plain, proper, and clear, and it is enough. God Himself has told us how to speak, both as to the matter and the manner: 'If any man speak,' in the name of God, 'let him speak as the oracles of God'; . . ."

Always content and form are held together, "And let him aim at no more ornament than he finds in that sentence which is the sum of the whole gospel, 'We love Him, because He first loved us.'"[28]

Wesley instructed his preachers that their preaching should have a four-fold aim: "(1) To invite. (2) To convince. (3) To offer Christ. (4) To build up: and to do this in some measure in every sermon."[29] This four-fold division affords a convenient structure by which to arrive at Wesley's understanding of preaching as a means of evangelism.

1. To Invite: This should not be interpreted as a mere device by which the preacher gains the attention of his congregation. A clue to understanding the significance of this phrase is given to us by Wesley himself:

> I think the right method of preaching is this. At our first beginning to preach at any place, after a general declaration of the love of God to sinners and His willingness that they should be saved . . .[30]

It should be kept in mind that the word 'general' was not meant to convey something vague, but refers to what was distinctive in Wesley's preaching, viz., the universal love of God. Wesley believed that God's invitation has every man's name written upon it and he urged his preachers to make this known at the very outset. The good news of God's redeeming love is the central motif and the displaced are offered a place, and the unloved are invited to share in God's boundless love. Wesley's theology finds practical expression in his evangelistic preaching.

Wesley does not infer that every sermon should begin in this way. He is referring to the first priority in what might be termed a mission to

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[28] Works, Vol. VI, p. 185.

[29] Minutes of Conference, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 317.

[30] Letters, Vol. III, pp. 79-80.

a specific community. There are many of Wesley's sermons which do begin with 'a general declaration of the love of God to sinners.'[31] Wesley is anxious that at the very outset no one should imagine that God's love does not extend to him. Wesley is the evangelist whose authority and motivation rests upon the fact of God's act in Jesus Christ for the world and he invites his listeners to celebrate with him in the wonder of God's grace.

2. To Convince: We have already had occasion to refer more than once to Wesley's use of the law. Here we see his theological understanding of the law operating in the practice of evangelism. After the initial proclamation of God's love for all, Wesley preached "the law in the strongest, the closest, the most searching manner possible."[32] In the same letter he explains what he means by preaching the law, "By preaching the law I mean explaining and enforcing the commands of Christ briefly comprised in the Sermon on the Mount."[33] Wesley believed that the law had a three-fold use. The first use of the law is to "slay the sinner,"[34] that is, to convince man of his urgent need of pardon. It is in fact the Holy Spirit who convinces the world of sin, but He does so by the law.[35] Not only is

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[31] Salvation by Faith, S, Vol. I, p. 37: "All the blessings which God hath bestowed upon man are of His mere grace, bounty, or favour; His free undeserved favour; favour altogether undeserved." Free Grace, Works, Vol. VII, p. 373: "How freely does God love the world! While we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly." Et al.

[32] Letters, Vol. III, p. 80. This letter, written in 1751, became an open letter first published in the Arminian Magazine in 1779, addressed to 'My dear Friend', but also entitled 'Of Preaching Christ'.

[33] Ibid., p. 79.

[34] The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law, S, Vol. II, p. 52.

[35] Ibid.

it the function of the law to bring man to the realization of his guilt before God, but it is the goad which compels him to turn to Christ for salvation. So the second use of the law is to bring the sinner to life, unto Christ. The law is the schoolmaster who drives rather than draws man to Christ.[36] But even now the law has not completed its work. The law also "keeps us alive."[37] Therefore, the preaching of the law must never be dispensed with. It is necessary for the sinner and believer alike to be under the preaching of the law. "To convince" is, therefore, a vital ingredient in Wesley's preaching.

Nevertheless, Wesley is firm that the law should never be preached without the gospel any more than the gospel should be preached without the law. "Undoubtedly both should be preached in their turns; yea both at once, or both in one."[38] When this is not done "preachers spread death not life, among their hearers."[39] On the other hand, when law and gospel are kept together, as they were in the preaching of such men as John Nelson, the members of the society are found to be "alive, strong, and vigorous of soul, believing, loving, and praising God their Saviour, and increased in number from eighteen or nineteen hundred to upwards of three thousand."[40] Wesley illustrates the kind of preaching

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[36] Ibid., p. 53. cf. Notes on the New Testament, Rom. 10:4. "It is the very design of the law, to bring men to believe in Christ for justification and salvation."

[37] Ibid., the triple functions of the law for Wesley may be correlated with Luther's uses; 1. Manifestation and reproof of sins. 2. Induces compulsion of the sinner to go to Christ. 3. Direction of moral actions. Calvin also teaches three uses (Institutes II, vii, 6-12): 1. To lead to Christ. 2. To curb sinners. 3. To instruct the elect. The first and third correspond to Wesley's three uses.

[38] Letters, Vol. III, p. 82.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., p. 83.

he is talking about:

> From the beginning they had been taught both the law and the gospel. 'God loves you: Therefore love and obey Him. Christ died for you: therefore died to sin. Christ is risen: therefore rise in the image of God. Christ liveth evermore: therefore, live to God, till you live with Him in glory.'[41]

The same note is struck consistently by Wesley in his own sermons:

> On the one hand, the law continually makes way for, and points up to, the gospel; on the other, the gospel continually leads us to a more exact fulfilling of the law. The law, for instance, requires us to love God, to love our neighbour, to be meek, humble, or holy: we feel that we are not sufficient for these things; yea, that 'with man this is impossible.' But we see a promise of God, to give us that love, and to make us humble, meek, and holy: we lay hold of this gospel, of these glad tidings: it is done unto us according to our faith; and 'the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us,' through faith which is in Christ Jesus.[42]

If the gospel is preached exclusively, the probable result is Antinomianism. If the law is preached, the opposite danger of Pharisaism is inevitable:

> But the truth lies between both. We are, doubtless, justified by faith. This is the corner-stone of the whole Christian building. We are justified without the works of the law, as any previous condition of justification; but they are an immediate fruit of that faith whereby we are justified. So that if good works do not follow our faith, even all inward and outward holiness, it is plain our faith is nothing worth; we are yet in our sins.[43]

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[41] Ibid., p. 85.

[42] Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, V, S, Vol. I, p. 403.

[43] The Law Established Through Faith, I, S, Vol. II, p. 66. George Whitefield makes this same point in a vivid way: "We must take care of healing before we see sinners wounded. Sinners must hear the thunderings of Mount Sinai, before we bring them to Mount Zion. They who never preach the law, it is to be feared are unskilful in delivering the glad tidings of the gospel. Every minister should be a Boanerges, a son of thunder, as well as a Barnabas, son of consolation. There was an earthquake and a whirlwind before the still small voice came to Elijah. We must shew people they are condemned, and then shew them how they must be saved." The Seed of the Woman, and the Seed of the Serpent, Sermon, No. 1. Cited by Horton Davies in Worship and Theology in England, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), Vol. III, p. 152.

3. To Offer Christ: Once man is convinced of his utter inadequacy to atone for his sin by any self-effort whatever and knows he is unable to fulfill God's purpose for him, he is ready to hear God's gift of forgiveness and power in His Son, Jesus Christ. Now the preacher must proclaim "that Christ is all in all, our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; that all life, love, strength are from Him alone, and all freely given to us through faith."[44] In Chapter II we noted Wesley's stress on the merits of Christ which alone makes possible man's forgiveness and reconciliation to God. We pointed out there that Wesley's main preoccupation was with the priestly work of Christ. Nevertheless, Wesley considered it imperative to preach Christ in all his offices:

> To preach Christ, as a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, is to preach Him, not only as our great High-Priest . . . but likewise as the Prophet of the Lord, 'who of God is made unto us wisdom'; who, by His Word and His Spirit, is with us always, 'guiding us into all the truth'; - yea, and as remaining King for ever; as giving laws to all whom He has bought with His blood; as restoring those to the image of God, whom He had first reinstated in His favour; as reigning in all believing hearts until He has 'subdued all things to Himself,' - until He hath utterly cast out all sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness.[45]

The so-called gospel-preachers, who preached exclusively the priestly office of Christ, came in for severe censure from Wesley. This sort of preaching resulted in the following question in Conference: "Q.38. Have not some of us been led off from practical preaching by

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[44] Letters, Vol. III, p. 82. cf. Ibid., p. 79. "I mean by 'preaching the gospel' preaching the love of God to sinners, preaching the life, death, resurrection, and intercession of Christ, with all the blessings which in consequence thereof are freely given to true believers."

[45] The Law Established Through Faith, II, S, Vol. II, p. 76.

what was called preaching Christ?"[46] The reply was in the affirmative and it was agreed that:

> The most effectual way of preaching Christ, is to preach him in all his offices, and to declare his law as well as his gospel, both to believers and to unbelievers. Let us strongly and closely insist upon inward and outward holiness, in all its branches.[47]

Wesley charges the gospel-preachers with corrupting their hearers and writes of their preaching:

> They vitiate their taste, so that they cannot relish sound doctrine; and spoil their appetite, so that they cannot turn it into nourishment; they, as it were, feed them with sweetmeats, till the genuine wine of the kingdom seems quite insipid to them.[48]

Wesley was appealing for the recognition of the Lordship of Christ and in offering Christ to his hearers he offered them one who was both Lord and Saviour. Closely linked with the omission of Christ's Lordship from the preaching of the gospel-preachers was their depreciation of the means of grace:

> One cries aloud, 'More people go to hell by praying, than by thieving.' Another screams out, 'Away with your works! Have done with your works, or you cannot come to Christ!' And this unscriptural, irrational, heathenish declamation is called <u>preaching the gospel</u>![49]

Theologically expressed, gospel preaching is preaching justification without regeneration or sanctification, of which Wesley writes:

> But of all preaching, what is usually called gospel preaching is the most useless, if not the most mischievous; a dull, yea or lively, harangue on the sufferings of Christ, or salvation

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[46] <u>Minutes of Conference</u>, <u>Works</u>, Vol. VIII, p. 318f.

[47] <u>Ibid</u>.

[48] <u>Letters</u>, Vol. III, p. 84.

[49] <u>The Reward of the Righteous</u>, <u>Works</u>, Vol. VII, p. 130.

> by faith without strongly inculcating holiness. I see more and more that this naturally tends to drive holiness out of the world.[50]

So strongly did Wesley feel about gospel preaching that he was in favor of dropping the word gospel altogether!

> That term is now become a mere cant word. I wish none of our Society would use it. It has no determinate meaning. Let but a pert, self-sufficient animal, that has neither sense nor grace, bawl out something about Christ and His blood or justification by faith, and his hearers cry out, 'What a fine gospel sermon!' Surely Methodists have not so learnt Christ. We know no gospel without salvation from sin.[51]

The danger of gospel preaching and the confusion it was causing among the Methodists led Wesley to write a tract entitled, Thoughts Concerning Gospel Ministers. In this tract Wesley states that a preacher does not qualify for this title merely by preaching the decrees, or speaking earnestly on the righteousness and blood of Christ, or listing the promises of Christ, or using soft words of comfort to entice sinners, or preaching justification by faith without insisting also upon sanctification.[52] Who then is a gospel minister?

> He, and he alone, of whatever denomination, that does declare the whole counsel of God; that does preach the whole gospel, even justification and sanctification, preparatory to glory. He that does not put asunder what God has joined, but publishes alike, 'Christ dying for us, and Christ living in us.' He that constantly applies all this to the hearts of the hearers, being willing to spend and be spent for them; having himself the mind which was in Christ, and steadily walking as Christ also walked; he, and he alone, can with propriety be termed a Gospel Minister.[53]

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[50] Letters, Vol. V, p. 345. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in more recent times, denounced this kind of preaching as 'cheap grace.' cf. The Cost of Discipleship, (New York: MacMillan, 1963).

[51] Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 326.

[52] Thoughts Concerning Gospel Ministers, Works, Vol. X, pp. 455-456.

[53] Ibid., p. 456.

In particular, there are two notes which must be sounded by the preacher before he can be said to be truly preaching the gospel. These are, the universal love of God, and that God's purpose for man is that he should be holy:

> This title of a gospel minister is therefore vilely prostituted, when it is given to any but those who testify 'that God willeth all men to be saved,' and 'to be perfect as their Father which is in heaven is perfect.'[54]

4. To Build Up: There is no need for us to develop this point. We have already indicated in some detail in Chapter III that the building up of the believer is fundamental to Wesley's mission. The goal of the Christian faith is not only the conversion of the sinner but union with God, and without holiness no man can see the Lord. Believers are formed by the Word, and they are also sustained by the Word. The believer is in a dynamic relation to the Word and must constantly hear the whole counsel of God, both law and gospel, in order to grow towards God's ultimate purpose, viz., to be in relationship of love with God and his fellow man.

In our study of Wesley's four-fold aim in preaching we have seen that his theology informs his preaching. Wesley invites all men to celebrate with him the fact of God's grace in Jesus Christ. He declares emphatically that because of his sin man is not able to achieve God's intention for him. At the same time he encourages all men to turn from their sin and accept God's gift of Jesus Christ, by whom alone, man can know the forgiveness of his sins, and the grace and power enabling him to fulfill God's purpose for his life, that is, no more and no less, than walking in the way of faith working by love. It is clear that Wesley's understanding of the Evangel informed his evangelistic preaching.

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[54] Ibid.

Before we leave this section we must correct a common and prevailing fallacy. The fallacy that Wesley's success as a preacher can be accounted for by his deliberate and persistent use of the fears of hell-fire as a means of terrifying his hearers and thereby creating a climate conducive to the crisis of conversion. It is not denied that Wesley believed in hell as a possibility for those who refused to repent and believe the gospel. Wesley shared the general belief in a literal hell which was common in eighteenth century England. Wesley grounds his belief in hell on Scripture. Against William Law, Wesley argues for the fact of hell as the place of everlasting punishment for unrepentant sinners. Once again his main point is that this is part of the revelation contained in Scripture which cannot be put aside: "No hell, no heaven, no revelation"![55]

Not only did Wesley believe in hell as an article of religion, he was ready to preach this quite bluntly from the pulpit. Unlike a certain eminent preacher who, on one occasion, said to the congregation at St. James: "If you do not repent, you will go to a place which I shall not name before this audience."[56] Yet, in the same letter that Wesley relates this story, he denies the charge of "profusely flinging about everlasting fire."[57]

It is freely acknowledged, therefore, that Wesley not only accepted the literal teaching of Scripture regarding hell, but that he took this teaching with the utmost seriousness and on occasions issued very stern warnings of the danger of everlasting punishment for the

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[55] Letters, pp. 368-370.

[56] Letters, Vol. II, p. 97.

[57] Ibid., p. 98.

unrepentant. What we are objecting to is the idea that Wesley deliberately and persistently used the approach of fear in his preaching, and that it is this method of preaching which brought about the Revival of the eighteenth century. This idea is put forward by William Sargant in his book, Battle for the Mind.[58] In the foreword Sargant writes: "John Wesley, and his methods demand particular study at the present time from politician and priest alike, even if the hellfire doctrine he preached may seem outmoded."[59]

Unaware of Wesley's strong belief in the sovereignty of God, his respect for reason, or his concern for the whole man, Sargant maintains that Wesley's great success was made possible by his discovery that habits of thought and behavior could be changed "by a tremendous assault on the emotions."[60] Wesley, Sargant claims, stumbled upon this "extremely effective technique of conversion,"[61] and with the help of his brother Charles whose hymns were addressed to "the religious emotions rather than the intelligence,"[62] he set out on his mission to the country. Wesley's

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[58]William Sargant, Battle for the Mind, (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1959). It is unfortunate that Douglas Webster in his otherwise excellent book, What is Evangelism?, (London: The Highway Press, 1959), accepts Sargant's thesis quite uncritically. Ian Ramage has pointed out that two psychiatrists in recent years have taken Sargant's version of Wesley at its face value, viz., Jerome D. Frank, Persuasion and Healing, (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 78; J.A.C. Brown, Techniques of Persuasion, (Penguin Books, 1963), p. 233. cf. Ian Ramage, Battle for the Free Mind, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1967).

[59]Ibid., p. 10. cf. Ibid., p. 127: ". . . hell, one of Wesley's powerful conversion weapons."

[60]Ibid., p. 82.

[61]Ibid., p. 84.

[62]Ibid.

method, according to Sargant, was to create high emotional tension by stressing hell-fire as a consequence of those who failed to achieve salvation:

> The immediate acceptance of an escape from such a ghastly fate was then strongly urged on the ground that anybody who left the meeting 'unchanged' and met with a sudden fatal accident before he had accepted this salvation, would pass straight into the fiery furnace.[63]

The best method of refuting this view is to let Wesley speak for himself, something which Sargant does not do. There is not a single quotation from any of Wesley's published sermons in Sargant's book. We have already shown that Wesley's emphasis was upon love rather than fear. As early as 1736, after a particularly severe storm at sea, Wesley records in his Journal that those who are dead to the appeal of love are unlikely to obey out of fear.[64] Curnock, commenting on this passage in the Journal, notes that Wesley "was sparing in his use of fear as a motive."[65] He continues: ". . . in the Four Volumes which form part of the doctrinal standards of the Methodist Church there is no sermon on Hell, or indeed on Heaven."[66] In the 1744 Minutes of Conference the preachers are criticized for preaching "too much of the wrath and too little of the love of God . . . thereby causing some to lose the joy of faith."[67] Wesley agrees with 'John Smith' that there is little good to be done by "the profuse throwing about of hell and damnation."[68]

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Journal, Vol. I, p. 139.

[65] Ibid., p. 139.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Minutes of Conference, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 284.

[68] Letters, Vol. II, p. 69.

Rattenbury, commenting on John Wesley's use of his brother's hymns, observes, "it is extraordinary how relatively little the terrors of hell are dealt with in these hymns of evangelistic appeal."[69] Rattenbury notes further that there is only one hymn on hell in the large hymn-book and, "while hymns on the "Four Last Things" contain only one hymn on hell, there are twelve on heaven."[70]

Wesley's sermon on Dives and Lazarus would have afforded him a wonderful opportunity to use the method attributed to him by Sargant, but even here Wesley's emphasis is the positive one of deliverance rather than the negative one of fear:

> 'In hell he lifted up his eyes,' This, it is certain, ye need not do. God does not require it of you: 'He willeth not that any should perish.' Ye, cannot, unless by your own wilful choice, - intruding into those regions of woe, which God did not prepare for you, but for 'the devil and his angels.'[71]

In the same sermon Wesley states explicitly that no method, whether it be method of fear, or of love, by itself, can change a man:

> It is certain that no human spirit, while it is in the body, can persuade another to repent; can work in him an entire change, both of heart and life; a change from universal wickedness, to universal holiness. And suppose that spirit discharged from the body, it is no more able to do this that it was before: No power less than that which created it at first can create any soul anew. No angel, much less any human spirit, whether in the body or out of the body, can bring one soul 'from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.' It might very possibly frighten him to death, or to the belief of any speculative truth; but it could not frighten him into spiritual life. God alone can raise those that are 'dead in trespasses and sins.'[72]

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[69] The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns, p. 78.

[70] Ibid., p. 79.

[71] Dives and Lazarus, Works, Vol. VII, p. 251.

[72] Ibid., p. 253.

Far from advising his preachers to frighten men into the kingdom of God, Wesley warns them against this very approach:

> Never dream of forcing men into the ways of God. Think yourself and let think. Use no constraint in matters of religion. Even those who are farthest out of the way never compel to come in by any other means than reason, truth, and love.[73]

Wesley's single sermon on Hell is not included in the Standard Sermons.[74] According to the Preface, Wesley never intended to publish this sermon which was printed in the Arminian Magazine, but did so because he was told that someone else was about to do so.[75] Sydney Dimond says of this sermon: "The only sermon of Wesley's on Hell is an elaborate argument, illustrated by many quotations and classical allusions which stamp it as an early academic exercise."[76] In this sermon Wesley refers to the exaggerated horrors predicted by many writers: "But I find no word, no tittle of this, not the least hint of it in all the Bible. And surely this is too awful a subject to admit of such play of imagination. Let us keep to the written word. It is torment enought to dwell with everlasting burnings."[77] Further, as we have already seen, Wesley does not believe that anyone is sent to Hell by God's intention. This awful fate is reserved for those 'who in spite of all the warnings of God, resolve to have their portion with the devil and his angels.'[78]

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[73] The Nature of Enthusiasm, S, Vol. II, p. 102. cf. The Wilderness State, S, Vol. II, p. 260; Letters, Vol. III, p. 213.

[74] Works, Vol. VI, p. 381f.

[75] Ibid., Preface, p. 185. Written in 1788.

[76] Sidney G. Dimond, The Psychology of the Methodist Revival, (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 83.

[77] Works, Vol. VI, p. 387.

[78] Ibid., p. 382.

According to the Sermon Register which covers the period from 1747 to 1761 Wesley never preached his sermon Of Hell.[79] It is clear that although Wesley believed in the possibility of future punishment for those who persistently rejected God's offer of salvation, he can hardly be accused of using this as a device to frighten men into the kingdom of God.[80]

In The Preacher's Manual, Adam Clarke, warning preachers against forever discouraging the people, recalls: "Mr. Wesley used to give the significant appellation of Croakers to those who were always telling the people, 'Ye are fallen! ye are fallen!' and he observed that such injured the work of God, wherever they came."[81] Wesley was a man of his time and believed in hell as the alternative to heaven, but on the evidence of his own writing he did not use the method of fear to compel men to be saved from their sins. Even Skevington-Wood, who clearly stands close to Wesley's literal belief in an everlasting hell for those who reject God's offer of salvation, concludes that, "Wesley was restrained in his handling of it, and his ultimate appeal was not to fear."[82] Williams agrees with this conclusion:

> Wesley's picture of hell is a literal transcription of the New Testament language, but it is important to notice that he has made small use of the threat of hell. . . his concern was to concentrate on the promises of the gospel available

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[79] Journal, Vol. VIII, pp. 169-252.

[80] Ibid., Vol. III, p. 323. "I would no more starve men into the Church than I would burn them into it."

[81] A Letter to a Preacher, on his Entrance into the Work of the Ministry, Adam Clarke, The Preacher's Manual, (New York: G. Lane and P.P. Sandford, 1842), pp. 84-85.

[82] The Burning Heart, p. 274.

> to us now, while at the same time showing that the appropriation of these promises is preparation for the life that is to come.[83]

Sargant's attempt to explain the impact of Wesley's mission and the occurrence of certain psychological phenomena as wholly due to fear especially in the early years of the revival, must be considered as being not proven. When we keep in mind the social conditions under which many people in eighteenth century England, and the inevitable brutalizing effect on family life, as well as the dehumanizing of the individual, it will help us to understand the sometimes extravagant and violent reactions to Wesley's preaching. Wesley was bold enough to tell these deprived and unloved people that God loved them! It was Wesley's rediscovery and reaffirmation of God's inclusive love for all, rather than any emphasis upon the threat of hell which sometimes resulted in the convulsive and irrational behavior of some of his auditors.[84]

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[83] John Wesley's Theology Today, p. 199. cf. "Eschatological Doctrines in the Writings of John and Charles Wesley." J. Cyril Downes, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1960. "Though Wesley did not neglect to preach Hell, he was more concerned to preach the positive love and grace of God." p. 187.

[84] The most serious and even dangerous aspect of Sargant's book is not his misunderstanding of the nature and practice of Wesley's evangelism. It lies in his suggestion that the contemporary Church should give serious consideration to the making use of methods or techniques which he wrongly attributes to the success of Wesley's mission in the eighteenth century. It is our contention that the Church must utterly refute any methods, whether they are 'successful' or not, which contradict on the one hand the sovereignty of God's grace, and on the other, the sanctity of man's responsible personality. To enter into a debate with Sargant on the larger question of evangelism and psycho-therapy would be to go beyond the scope of this project and the competence of its writer. However, Ian Ramage, a writer qualified in every respect, does do this in his book, Battle for the Free Mind, to which reference has already been made. Ramage strongly supports the major point of this study, namely, that Wesley did not use the threat of hell-fire as a technique to precipitate a crisis in order to bring about the conversion of his hearers.

The Administration of the Sacraments

The purpose of this section is not to present a detailed study of Wesley's doctrine of the Sacraments. Our intention is the much more limited one of presenting Wesley's understanding of the Sacraments as means of grace in relation to the task of evangelism.

1. The Sacrament of Baptism: Wesley's references to Baptism are isolated and fragmentary. However, in 1756 he published a Treatise on Baptism, which was an adaptation of a confirmation manual entitled, The Pious Communicant Rightly Prepared, written by his father, Samuel Wesley, in 1700.[85] A major problem emerges when we contrast this Treatise, which includes the traditional statement of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, with Wesley's doctrine of the New Birth.

On the one hand, Wesley apparently affirms the traditional teaching of baptismal regeneration,[86] and on the other, as has already been shown, he makes a radical distinction between baptism and regeneration.[87] In a letter to William Law in 1756 Wesley clearly demonstrates his firm belief that God's normal way of working is through the established means of grace and recognizes Baptism as one of these, instituted by

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[85] Works, Vol. X, pp. 188-201.

[86] Ibid., p. 190f. The benefits of baptism are listed as, the washing away of the guilt of original sin, entering into covenant with God, entrance into the Church, and consequently, made members of Christ, its head, being made the children of God and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

[87] The New Birth, S, Vol. II, p. 237. This sermon should be read together with The Marks of the New Birth, S, Vol. I, p. 280f.

Christ, and therefore, mandatory for the Church's worship.[88] The probable reason for Wesley not including Baptism in his list of the Instituted Means is that the people for whom the list was intended were already baptized.

Wesley believed that Baptism as a sacrament instituted by Christ was a means of grace, but that the intention of this grace was to lead man to a further conscious acceptance of that grace by which a man is justified and sanctified. Therefore, men ought not to trust in their Baptism for salvation but to prove their Baptism by trusting in Jesus Christ for their salvation. The true end of Baptism is to initiate the crisis of regeneration:

> No stress is laid on the age of the baptized, or the manner of performing it, in one or the other; but only on our being risen with Christ, through the powerful operation of God in the soul; which we cannot but know assuredly, if it really is so; and if we do not experience this, our baptism has not answered the end of its institution.[89]

Not only is the mode of Baptism a matter of opinion rather than doctrine for Wesley, but the sacrament itself is not necessary to salvation: "You think the mode of baptism is 'necessary to salvation': I deny that even baptism itself is so; if it were, every Quaker must be damned, which I can in no wise believe."[90]

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[88] Letters, Vol. IV, p. 357:

> Vain philosophy! The plain meaning of the expression, "Except a man be born of water," is neither more nor less that this, "Except ye be baptized." And the plain reason why he ought to be thus born of water is because God has appointed it. He hath appointed it an an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace; which grace is "a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness."

[89] Notes on the New Testament, Col. 2:12. Italics mine.

[90] Letters, Vol. III, p. 36.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that for Wesley, Baptism as a means of grace is of less importance, both theologically and practically, than the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He accepts and insists on Baptism as a means of grace because Scripture witnesses to its institution by Christ. But Wesley knows that God's grace is not limited to Baptism and his emphasis falls upon the other means of grace instituted by Christ. There are several other probable reasons for Wesley's relative neglect of Baptism as a means of grace. Firstly, his doctrine of conditional election demands a conscious belief in Jesus Christ; therefore, he emphasized those means which involved a conscious participation; namely, Prayer, The Lord's Supper, Scripture, Fasting, and the Christian conference. Secondly, arising out of the first, Wesley ministered in an age when many regarded Baptism not as a means but as an end in itself. Therefore, his major point was to ensure that Baptism answered the end of its institution, namely, the conscious entering into the new life in Christ. Wesley, it will be recalled, was faced with a paralyzing formalism in the Church, a characteristic of which was the trust in the externals to the neglect of vital piety. Although Wesley attempted to maintain the tension between Baptism as an objective means of grace and conversion as a subjective means of grace, Williams' point is well taken when he remarks, "while Wesley kept both sides of the tension, he did not spell it out with sufficient force, with the result that there has been great confusion on the subject in Methodism since his death."[91] Thirdly, under normal circumstances Baptism is not repeatable, whereas all the other means which he lists are repeatable and therefore

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[91] John Wesley's Theology Today, p. 121.

serve as a constant, renewing source of grace for the Christian life. This last needs to be qualified inasmuch as Baptism is not private but public and in the presence of the gathered Church each Baptism is a reminder to every Church member to renew his covenant with God.

Once again, it is illuminating to see how Wesley's evangelism and the means he employed were informed by his theology. He is able to retain Baptism as an objective means of grace because of his doctrine of Prevenient Grace, but at the same time his stress is primarily upon the conscious experience of the New Birth with its attendant assurance. It is also interesting to note how the formalism of his age led him to stress with added urgency the need for Baptism to answer the end of its institution.

2. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper: John C. Bowmer has shown conclusively that in the Church of England in the eighteenth century, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was "infrequently administered and indifferently regarded by large numbers of both clergy and laity."[92] After listing the possible reasons which brought about this situation, and advancing further documentation in support of his position, Bowmer concludes:

> The evidence seems to show that the majority of the serious-minded church-going people of the eighteenth century received the sacrament on the great festivals of the Church Year; but in some parishes, mainly in London and a few large towns, there were churches where monthly celebrations were held.[93]

In contrast to this general neglect of the sacrament, Wesley not only communicated on an average every five days, but he also urged his

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[92] John C. Bowmer, The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism, (London: Dacre Press, 1951), p. 3f.

[93] Ibid., p. 8.

followers to communicate constantly. In his sermon, The Duty of Constant Communion, Wesley laid it down as the duty of every Christian to receive the Lord's Supper as often as he can.[94] The Sacrament operates as Law and Gospel. We observe the Sacrament because we are commanded to, and because of the promise of forgiveness to those who participate. Members of the Band-Societies were directed "to be at Church and at the Lord's table every week."[95] The prominent place given to the Lord's Supper is further demonstrated in a letter written by Wesley late in his life. "It would be worth while to talk at large with that young man who neglects the Lord's Supper. But if he obstinately persists in that neglect, you can't give him any more tickets for our Society."[96]

There was a time when Wesley demanded Baptism by an episcopably ordained minister as a requirement for participation in the sacrament. In Georgia he refused the sacrament to a Moravian pastor on these grounds.[97] In later years Wesley came to regret this expression of High Church narrowness:

> What a truly Christian piety and simplicity breathe in these lines! And yet this very man, when I was at Savannah, did I refuse to admit to the Lord's Table, because he was not

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[94] Works, Vol. VII, p. 147f. This sermon was first written by Wesley for his students at Oxford, and re-issued in 1788. Wesley comments: "The following Discourse was written above five-and-fifty years ago, for the use of my pupils at Oxford. I have added very little, but retrenched much; as I then used more words than I do now. But, I thank God, I have not yet seen cause to alter my sentiments in any point which is therein delivered."

[95] Directions to the Band-Societies, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 274.

[96] Letters, Vol. VIII, p. 41. Even Charles Wesley doesn't escape criticism in this regard. cf. Letters, Vol. III, p. 114: "Why do you omit giving the sacrament in Kingswood? What is reading prayers at Bristol in comparison of this? I am sure, in making this vehement alteration, you never consulted with me."

[97] Journal, Vol. I, p. 370.

> baptized - that is, not baptized by a minister who had been episcopally ordained. Can any one carry High Church zeal higher than this? And how well have I been since beaten with mine own staff![98]

We are fortunate in having Wesley's definitive statement on the Lord's Supper as a means of grace in a sermon which he preached in 1739.[99] The main reason for this sermon was the so-called doctrine of stillness which was believed and propagated by some of the Moravians in the Fetter Lane Society. Wesley's Journal covering the period November 1, 1739 to September 3, 1741, gives a full account of this controversy.[100] Once again our major concern is to understand what the Moravians taught and to note in particular Wesley's teaching over against their doctrine of stillness.[101]

After a lengthy conversation with Mr. Molther, Wesley records in his Journal the Moravian position as he understood it:

> As to the way to faith, you believe: That the way to attain it is to wait for Christ, and be still - that is, Not to use (what we term) the means of grace; Not to go to church; Not to communicate; Not to fast; Not to use so much private prayer; Not to read the Scripture; (Because you believe these are not means of grace; that is, do not ordinarily convey God's grace to unbelievers; and that it is impossible for a man to use them without trusting in them.)[102]

At first Wesley did everything he could to refute this teaching from within the society, but finally, he had no alternative but to withdraw from the Fetter Lane Society. On July 20, 1740, Wesley attended

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[98] Ibid., Vol. III, p. 434.

[99] The Means of Grace, S, Vol. I, p. 237f.

[100] Journal, Vol. II, pp. 309-500.

[101] Wesley argued that the doctrine of stillness, first preached by Philip Molther on his arrival in England in 1739, was not part of the Moravian doctrine. Vide, Journal, Vol. I, pp. 430-431.

[102] Journal, Vol. II, p. 329.

the society for the last time. After summarizing the Moravian position Wesley declared:

> I believe these assertions to be flatly contrary to the Word of God. I have warned you hereof again and again, and besought you to turn back to the Law and to the Testimony. I have borne with you long, hoping you would turn. But as I find you more and more confirmed in the error of your ways, nothing now remains but that I should give you up to God. You that are of the same judgement, follow me.[103]

Wesley was not unaware that the means of grace were abused by some who trusted in their works of piety for their salvation. Nevertheless, he insists that the means are instituted by Christ as God's way of conveying His grace:

> The main question remains: We know this salvation is the gift and the work of God; 'but how (may one say who is convinced he hath it not) may I attain thereto?' If you say, 'Believe, and thou shalt be saved'! he answers, 'True; but how shall I believe?' You reply, 'Wait upon God.' 'Well; but how am I to wait? In the means of grace, or out of them? Am I to wait for the grace of God which bringeth salvation, by using these means, or by laying them aside?'[104]

In other words, Wesley affirmed that salvation is of God alone and that man must wait upon the Lord. But his understanding of waiting was informed by Scripture and diametrically opposed to the doctrine of stillness proposed by the Moravians. God is pleased to offer His grace by His appointed means, which are instituted by Christ and witnessed to in the Scriptures. To deny the means of grace is to fly in the face of

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[103] Ibid., p. 370f. Wesley adds: "I then, without saying anything more, withdrew, as did eighteen or nineteen of the Society."

[104] The Means of Grace, S, Vol. I, p. 245. Wesley is confident that if we will but consult the Word of God we will know what God's will is on this question. "We have only to consult the oracles of God; to inquire what is written there; and, if we simply abide by their decision, there can no possible doubt remain."

Scripture and to resist God's appointed way.[105]

The point which is of special interest to our study is Wesley's insistance that all men should avail themselves of the means of grace. Believing as he did in the universal love of God and that the means of grace are not only confirming but also converting ordinances, it was natural that Wesley should invite not only believers but all men to the table of the Lord. Scripture and experience informed Wesley's position. Wesley reminds those who maintained that only believers ought to communicate that:

> Our Lord commanded those very men who were then unconverted, who had not yet received the Holy Ghost, who (in the full sense of the word) were not believers, to do this 'in remembrance of' Him. Here the precept is clear. And to those He delivered the elements with His own hands. Here is example equally indisputable.[106]

Wesley knew of a number of people who claimed to be converted whilst in attendance at the Lord's Supper. One of these was his own mother:

> I talked largely with my mother, who told me that, till a short time since, she had scarce heard such a thing mentioned as the having forgiveness of sins now, or God's Spirit bearing witness with our spirit; much less did she imagine that this was the common privilege of all true believers. 'Therefore,' said she, 'I never durst ask for it myself. But two or three weeks ago, while my son Hall was pronouncing those words, in delivering the cup to me, "The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee," the words struck through my heart, and I knew God for Christ's sake had forgiven me all my sins'[107]

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[105] Ibid., p. 255. Wesley is careful to point out that God is not limited to His appointed means. cf. Ibid., p. 259: "It behoves us first, always to retain a lively sense, that God is above all means. Have a care, therefore of limiting the Almighty. He doeth whatsoever and whensoever it pleaseth Him. He can convey His grace either in or out of any of the means which He hath appointed."

[106] Journal, Vol. II, p. 361.

[107] Ibid., p. 267. cf. Ibid., p. 315.

Wesley recounts the instance of another woman who had been told by one of the proponents of stillness not to communicate, but, in her concern for salvation she disregarded the advice "and 'He was made known unto' her 'in breaking of bread.' In that moment she felt her load removed, she knew she was accepted in the Beloved."[108] Accordingly, to those who affirmed that the Lord's Supper is not a converting but only a confirming ordinance, Wesley exclaims:

> But experience shows the gross falsehood of that assertion that the Lord's Supper is not a converting ordinance. Ye are the witnesses. For many now present know, the very beginning of your conversion to God (perhaps, in some, the first deep conviction) was wrought at the Lord's Supper. Now, one single instance of this kind overthrows the whole assertion.[109]

We noticed earlier that when Wesley was in Georgia he stipulated baptism by an episcopably ordained clergyman, not confirmation, as the requirement for attendance at the Lord's Supper. But even this requirement was relaxed and the single requirement was a desire to be saved. Against the Moravians he insisted that this means of grace was manifold. That is, the sacrament is both converting and confirming:

> I showed at large: (1) That the Lord's Supper was ordained by God to be a means of conveying to men either preventing, or justifying, or sanctifying grace, according to their several necessities. (2) That the persons for whom it was ordained are all those who know and feel that they want the grace of God, either to restrain them from sin, or to show sins forgiven, or to renew their souls in the image of God. (3) That inasmuch as we come to His table, not to give Him anything, but to receive whatsoever He sees best for us, there is no previous preparation indispensably necessary, but a desire to receive whatsoever He pleases to give. And (4) That no fitness is required at the time of communicating; but a sense of our state, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness; every one who knows he is fit for hell being just fit to come to Christ in this as well as all other ways of His appointment.[110]

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[108] Ibid., p. 280.

[109] Ibid., p. 361.

[110] Ibid., p. 361f.

Apostolic Discipline

We conclude the section on the Instituted Means of grace with a brief statement on the means other than preaching and the sacraments which are specifically mentioned by Wesley. These are prayer, searching the Scriptures, fasting, and Christian conference. These latter can be conveniently grouped under a single heading, namely, Apostolic Discipline. Our intention is not an exhaustive study of these means, but simply to show that these means too are not only for the believer but for all. They are for all because they too are converting ordinances. It is for this reason that Wesley uses them as a means of evangelism.

1. Prayer: In his sermon on The Means of Grace Wesley includes private and congregational prayer as a means of grace.[111] In the Minutes he enlarges upon this. "Prayer; private, family, public; consisting of deprecation, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving."[112] Quoting extensively from the New Testament, Wesley shows that "it is the express direction of our Lord Himself that all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the way of prayer."[113] Wesley, claiming Scriptural support, explicitly states that prayer is a means of grace for all. "From this scripture, therefore, as well as those cited above, we must infer, that all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the way of prayer."[114]

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[111] Sermons, Vol. I, p. 245f.

[112] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 322. Deprecation is what is known today as confession of sin in prayer.

[113] The Means of Grace, S, Vol. I, p. 245f.

[114] Ibid., p. 248.

2. Searching the Scriptures: Searching the Scriptures includes Reading, Meditating, and hearing.[115] The Scriptures are to be read daily, carefully, (with the assistance of Wesley's Notes), seriously, and fruitfully, that is, putting into practice what is read in the Bible.[116] The Scriptures are not limited to the New Testament but include the Old Testament as well. Referring to the visit of Paul and Silas to Berea which is recorded in Acts 17:11 and 12, Wesley indicates how great a blessing attends the use of this means:

> It is probable, indeed, that in some of those who had 'received the word with all readiness of mind,' 'faith came,' as the same Apostle speaks, 'by hearing,' and was only confirmed by reading the Scriptures: but it was observed above, that, under the general term of searching the Scriptures, both hearing, reading, and meditiating are contained.[117]

Scripture is profitable "'for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness'; to the end, 'the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works'"[118] But Scripture is profitable, "not only for the men of God, for those who walk already in the light of His countenance; but also for those who are yet in darkness, seeking Him whom they know not."[119]

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[115] Minutes, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 323. cf. Preface to Notes on the Old Testament, Works, Vol. XIV, p. 267. Wesley's recommended method for Bible Study.

[116] Ibid.

[117] The Means of Grace, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 250.

[118] Ibid. The scripture reference is II Timothy 4:16.

[119] Ibid. Wesley quotes in support, II Peter 1:19, "and we have the word of prophecy more confirmed; to which ye do well that ye take heed, as to a lamp that shone in a dark place, till the day should dawn, and the morning star arise in your hearts." cf. Journal, Vol. II, pp. 156-157 for reference to Wesley's occasional tendency to open the Bible haphazardly when in doubt as to God's will. He did not always accept the text in these instances, as divinely determined.

Wesley concludes: "Let all therefore who desire that day to dawn upon their hearts, wait for it in searching the Scriptures."[120]

3. Fasting: Under this heading Wesley merely asks: "How do you fast every Friday?"[121] The members of the Holy Club rigidly observed all the fasts of the Church, and in addition, every Wednesday and Friday. During his stay in Georgia, Wesley faithfully maintained this discipline. Wesley says of fasting:

> It is not all, nor yet is it nothing. It is not the end, but it is a precious means thereto; a means which God Himself has ordained, and in which therefore, when it is duly used, He will surely give us His blessing.[122]

Fasting and prayer go together and the former is an aid to prayer.[123]

Wesley imposed only one condition of membership in the society - "a desire to 'flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins.'"[124] But those who do express this desire and wish to continue in the society must "evidence their desire of salvation."[125] And one of the ways to do this is to attend all of the ordinances of God, one of which is fasting.[126]

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[120] Ibid., p. 251.

[121] Minutes, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 323.

[122] Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, VII, S, Vol. I, p. 451.

[123] Ibid., p. 458.

[124] General Rules of the United Societies, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 270.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid., p. 271. cf. Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, VII, S, Vol. I, p. 455. "Here then is the natural ground of fasting. One who is under deep affliction, overwhelmed with sorrow for sin, and a strong apprehension of the wrath of God, would, without any rule, without knowing or considering whether it were a command of God or not, 'forget to eat his bread,' abstain not only from pleasant but even from needful food; like St. Paul, who, after he was led into Damascus, 'was three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink.' (Acts 9:9)".

In other words, fasting is not meritorious in the sense that man puts God in his debt by fasting. Rather, fasting as a discipline is an indication of a man's seriousness in seeking salvation. Fasting, therefore, is more than a means of grace to be employed by those going on to perfection, but like all the other means of grace, it is for all men.

4. Christian Conference: Under this head Wesley asks:

> Are you convinced how important and how difficult it is to 'order your conversation right?' Is it 'always in grace? seasoned with salt? meet to minister grace to the hearers?' Do you not converse too long at a time? Is not an hour commonly enough? Would it not be well always to have a determinate end in view; and to pray before and after it?[127]

As it stands, this means of grace is somewhat vague. We take it to include all kinds of Christian conference. Repeatedly in his Diary Wesley refers to conversing either in small groups or with an individual. The importance with which Wesley regarded the conferences for his preachers is well known. There are also those conferences held by the Bands and Societies which included personal testimony as well as exhortation. The point is that Christians ought to regard every opportunity of conversing as a means of grace. But conference, whether they be between individuals, small groups, or on a larger scale, should consist in conversation on the work of God and should not be abused by religious gossiping, idle chatter, or overlong speeches! The purpose of Christian conference is not only to build up the believers but also to help the seeker to find his salvation in Jesus Christ.

In Chapter III it was seen that for Wesley the end of evangelism is holiness. Therefore, he saw the evangelistic task not only in terms of securing a decision for Christ, but that of presenting every man

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[127] Ibid., p. 323.

perfect in Christ Jesus. Nonetheless, Wesley believed that justification and regeneration, which are coincident in experience, must precede sanctification. In other words, the gospel summons man to a journey whose goal is faith working by love, but every journey implies a beginning. The Christian life is a series of surrenders, but there cannot be a second surrender until there has been a first. Consequently, the more immediate task of evangelism is to offer Christ to all men so that their conscious walk in His way may begin. The crisis of the New Birth initiates the on-going process of sanctification. This is why Wesley insisted, over against the advocates of stillness, that the means of grace are not only for the believer but also for those who desire to be saved.

The means of grace are means of evangelism in the narrow sense in that they are converting ordinances. But the means of grace are means of evangelism in the wider sense in that the end of evangelism is holiness. The Christian life is a life of continual growth and believers must avail themselves of the means of grace so that growth may be a reality. God's grace is not given in large supply, but can be compared with the manna which comes to man new every day. The Christian is utterly dependent upon sanctifiying grace and neglects the means of grace at his peril. Therefore, Wesley urged <u>all</u> men to attend the means of grace because they can meet the need of every man, whether his need be of justifying or sanctifying grace.

Wesley was not prepared to limit God's grace to the Instituted Means. The means of grace instituted by Christ are certainly the ordinary means of grace and as such, are indispensable. But there are other means which are not permanent, but rather prudential, arising out of the actual situation in which the work of evangelism is being done. It is to these Prudential Means that we now turn.

Prudential Means

Wesley believed that the Holy Spirit works in a variable way, and consequently, he never formalized the way man comes to salvation. He never doubted that the power of the Holy Spirit was available in every age, including his own. Therefore, he expected that certain prudential helps would become apparent to the discerning and obedient Christian. Helps by which the all important work of evangelism would be accomplished. In using these Prudential Means of evangelism Wesley encountered opposition from the clergy and from within his own Societies. This last is ironical in that the formation of Societies themselves was a Prudential Means employed by Wesley! To the latter Wesley pointed out the advantages of Prudential Means which were not binding and could be changed to meet the changing situations in which the gospel was to be preached:

> That with regard to these little prudential helps we are continually changing one thing after another is not a weakness or fault, as you imagine, but a peculiar advantage which we enjoy. By this means we declare them all to be merely prudential, not essential, not of divine institution. We prevent, so far as in us lies, their growing formal or dead. We are always open to instruction; willing to be wiser every day than we were before, and to change whatever we can change for the better.[128]

Over against the criticism of the ecclesiastical authorities Wesley insisted that he had no intention of starting a new church, that his sole intention was to make "Christians, men of faith and love."[129] Wesley shows that the prudential helps he employed were those "which our Church neither enjoins nor forbids, as being in themselves of a purely indifferent nature."[130] The prudential helps Wesley used he believed to

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[128] Letters, Vol. II, p. 298.

[129] Ibid., Vol. III, p. 37.

[130] Ibid., p. 36; Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 333.

be "grounded on reason and experience, in order to apply the general rules given in Scripture according to particular circumstances."[131]

Field-Preaching

Strictly speaking, field-preaching is an Instituted Means of evangelism having a Prudential form. Wesley believed he had a commission to preach the gospel but he was denied the use of the pulpits of the Church of England and turned to field-preaching as one means of fulfilling his commission.[132] It was only after considerable doubt and disquiet[133] that Wesley finally took to the fields:

> At four in the afternoon I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining the city, to about three thousand people.[134]

Despite his initial doubts, once he started on this course Wesley soon appreciated the tremendous benefits arising from this means of evangelism. He frequently refers to the positive response of the vast crowds who came together to see this strange sight:

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[131] Ibid., Vol. II, p. 302.

[132] The reasons usually given by the ecclesiastical authorities for denying Wesley access to the pulpits were twofold, Doctrinal and Practical. They accused him of preaching a "new" doctrine, and the crowds he attracted were so large that there was no room for the regular members. Works, Vol. XIII, p. 307.

[133] Journal, Vol. II, p. 167: "In the evening I reached Bristol, and met Mr. Whitefield there. I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he set me an example on Sunday; having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church."

[134] Ibid., p. 172, (April 2, 1739). Wesley's text on this memorable occasion was, appropriately enough, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted; to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

> A vast majority of the immense congregation in Moorfields were deeply serious. One such hour might convince any impartial man of the expediency of field-preaching. What building, except St. Paul's Church, would contain such a congregation? And if it would, what human voice could have reached them there? By repeated observations I find I can command thrice the number in the open air that I can under a roof. And who can say the time for field-preaching is over, while, (1) greater numbers than ever attend; (2) the converting as well as convincing power of God is eminently present with them.[135]

Wesley was convinced that by using this means he was reaching people who would not hear the gospel in any other way:

> I preached on the Green at Bedminster. I am apt to think many of the hearers scarce ever heard a Methodist before, or perhaps any other preacher. What but field-preaching could reach these poor sinners? And are not their souls also precious in the sight of God?[136]

Opposition was not slow in forthcoming, and Wesley was forced to defend his practice of field-preaching.[137] He explains that in the first instance he resorted to preaching in the fields only because he had no choice:

> But I have since seen much abundant reasons to adore the wise providence of God herein, making a way for myriads of people who never troubled any church, nor were likely so to do, to hear that word which they soon found to be the power of God unto salvation.[138]

Elsewhere Wesley presents his apologia for field-preaching in more detail:

> Be pleased to observe: (1) That I was forbidden, as by a general consent, to preach in any church, (though not by any judicial sentence,) 'for preaching such doctrine.' This was the open, avowed cause; there was at that time no other, either real or pretended, except that the people crowded so. (2) That I had no desire or design to preach

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[135] Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 354, (Sept. 23, 1759).

[136] Ibid., Vol. V, p. 30. cf. Ibid., p. 234. "In field-preaching, more than any other means, God is found of them that sought Him not."

[137] A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 210. Wesley refers his readers to a number of vicious attacks made on himself and his followers.

[138] A Short History of the People Called Methodists, Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 307-308.

> in the open air, till after this prohibition. (3) That when I did, as it was no matter of choice, so neither of premeditation. There was no scheme at all previously formed, which was to be supported thereby; nor had I any other end in view that this, - to save as many souls as I could. (4) Field-preaching was therefore a sudden expedient, a thing submitted to, because I thought preaching even thus, better than not preaching at all: First, in regard to my own soul, because a 'dispensation of the gospel being committed to me,' I did not dare 'not to preach the gospel': Secondly, in regard to the souls of others, whom I everywhere saw 'seeking death in the error of their life.'[139]

Some of Wesley's opponents charged that field-preaching was illegal. These charges and Wesley's response to them can be summarized as follows:

1. To the charge that the Methodists have not qualified themselves or their assemblies according to the Act of Toleration, Wesley replied that insofar as Methodists were not Dissenters they did not have to. Furthermore, the Methodists were not breaking any laws, therefore, they did not have to make use of the Act of Toleration.

2. To the charge that the Methodists had violated the Statute which explicitly forbade field-preaching, Wesley replied that the Methodists revere government, that the Statute applies to Dissenters and therefore did not touch the Methodists. Wesley argued that the design of the Statute was to suppress and prevent sedition and no charge of sedition can be laid at the door of the Methodists.

3. To the further charge that the Methodists were unwittingly being used by evil men to embarrass the government, Wesley submits that he knows the overwhelming majority of those who attend his meetings, moreover field-preaching takes place in the open day; and therefore, it is impossible for seditious persons to use the occasions to further their

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[139] A Farther Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 112-113.

own ends.[140]

Wesley reminds his opponents that none of the Religious Societies had been declared illegal and if the plea that they are not Dissenters from the Church is used for them, and that because their meetings are not seditious the Statute against seditious meetings does not apply to them, then the Methodists can make the same plea.[141]

To those of a milder spirit who in their opposition to field-preaching asked: "Are there not churches enough to preach in?"[142] Wesley replied that he was not allowed to preach in them. When it was suggested that there were enough ministers without him, Wesley replied more warmly, that the fact that there were vast numbers of people who were not Christian suggested that there were not enough churches or ministers. But the real reason for many being as yet unclaimed for Christ is that they never came near the Church. The Christian's response is not to blame them for their neglect of the Church but to seek after them, in the name of the One who sought after all men when they went astray. No matter how fervently the Minister of the parish preached Sunday by Sunday it would not help those who never attended:

> But when one came and said, 'Yonder is a man preaching on the top of the mountain,' they ran in droves to hear what he would say; and God spoke to their hearts. It is hard to conceive anything else which could have reached them. Had it not been for field-preaching, the uncommonness of which was the very circumstance that recommended it, they must have run on in the error of their way, and perished in their blood.[143]

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[140] Ibid., pp. 112-116.

[141] Ibid., p. 117.

[142] Ibid., p. 229.

[143] Ibid., pp. 229-230.

Wesley admits that his choice of a preaching place would be a church building rather than an open field:

> What marvel the devil does not love field-preaching! Neither do I: I love a commodious room, a soft cushion, a handsome pulpit. But where is my zeal, if I do not trample all these underfoot in order to save one more soul?[144]

Wesley lists some of the difficulties and discomforts that go with field-preaching. The hot sun, the wind and rain, the snow and frost are but minor inconveniences when compared with some of the other hazards he experienced:

> Far beyond all these, are the contradiction of sinners, the scoffs both of the great vulgar and the small; contempt and reproach of every kind; often more than verbal affronts, stupid, brutal violence, sometimes to the hazard of health, or limbs, or life.[145]

In light of these difficulties and dangers associated with field-preaching, Wesley challenges his fellow clergy: "What, I pray, would buy you to be a field-preacher?"[146] Only that man who firmly believed it was the will of God would continue to preach under such adverse conditions. Wesley was such a man. God's message of universal love must be proclaimed to all men, whether they were within the walls of the Church, or out on the highways and byways. The responsibility of God's messenger is not to wait for men to come to him, but to go to men wherever they are. Wesley's position is aptly summed up in a letter written to his brother Samuel:

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[144] Journal, Vol. IV, p. 325.

[145] A Farther Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 231.

[146] Ibid., p. 231.

> O my Brother, who hath bewitched you, that for fear of I know not what Distant Consequences, you cannot rejoice at, nor so much as acknowledge, the Great Power of God? How is it, that you can't praise God, for saving so many Souls from Death and covering such a Multitude of Sins, unless he will begin this Work, within 'Consecrated Walls'? Why should he not fill Heaven and Earth? You cannot, indeed you cannot, confine the Most High within Temples, made with Hands. I do not despise them, any more than you. But I rejoice to find, that God is everywhere. I love the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church. But I see, wellpleased, that our Great Lord can work without them. And howsoever and wheresoever a Sinner is converted from the Error of his Ways, nay and by whomsoever, I thereat rejoice, yea and will rejoice![147]

Lay-Preachers

John Wesley's employment of lay-preachers must also be seen as an Instituted Means having a Prudential form. In the Minutes of Conference, Wesley relates how he came to use lay-preachers. "After a time, a young man, named Thomas Maxfield, came and desired to help me as a son in the gospel."[148] By the time of the first Conference (1744) there were thirty-five lay-preachers in the itinerant ministry and three local preachers.[149] The annual Conference, described by Albert Outler as "one of those strokes of practical genius that marked off Wesleyan Methodism from the other vectors of the Evangelical Revival,"[150] served as a training

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[147] Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, Vol. XXXIII, Part 5, March, 1962, p. 101. This letter, written on Oct. 27, 1739, to Samuel Wesley is not published in the Standard Edition of the Letters of John Wesley.

[148] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 311. cf. Henry Moore, The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, (London: John Kershaw, 1824), Vol. I, p. 505f. Moore reveals that initially Wesley never intended his helpers to preach, but when it did take place, Wesley recognized the hand of God and became resigned and later enthusiastic in the use of this prudential means of evangelism.

[149] William Myles, Chronological History of the People Called Methodists, 4th Edition, pp. 446-449. Quoted by A.B. Lawson, John Wesley and the Christian Ministry, (London: S.P.C.K., 1963), p. 27.

[150] John Wesley, p. 135.

center for Wesley's preachers. Although the major part of the time was taken up with the major doctrines of the faith, Wesley also used this time to give his preachers some practical training as well. The lay-preachers were advised to rise at four! The first hour should be spent in prayer and Bible study. From six until twelve the preachers were to study. To assist them in this task Wesley published A Christian Library.[151] Those preachers who balked at so demanding a schedule and pleaded that they had no taste for reading were told to acquire a taste for reading by reading, "or return to your trade."[152] Partly on account of this study requirement and partly on account of Wesley's insistence on itinerancy, no preacher was allowed to follow a trade and remain a preacher.[153] The afternoons were to be given over to house-to-house visitation, teaching young and old. We have already noticed that Wesley advised his preachers on the best general method of preaching: namely, (1) To Invite, (2) To Convince, (3) To offer Christ, (4) To build up; and to do this in some measure in every sermon. There follows a long list of practical hints on preaching, including such detailed advice as, "after preaching, take a little lemonade, mild ale, or candied orange-peel."[154]

In A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists, Wesley lists the duties of his Assistants:

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[151] A Christian Library, Consisting of Extracts from and Abridgments of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity. First published in 1750 in fifty volumes.

[152] Minutes, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 315.

[153] Ibid., p. 314.

[154] Ibid., p. 319.

> (1) To expound every morning and evening. (2) To meet the united society, the bands, the select society, and the penitents, once a week. (3) To visit the classes once a quarter. (4) To hear and decide all differences. (5) To put the disorderly back on trial, and to receive on trial for the bands or society. (6) To see that the Stewards, Leaders, and the Schoolmasters faithfully discharge their several offices. (7) To meet the Leaders of the bands and classes weekly, and the Stewards, and to overlook their accounts.[155]

Aspiring preachers had to evidence three marks before they were accepted on trial; namely conversion, gifts and graces for the work, and fruit. "Are any truly convinced of sin, and converted to God, by their preaching?"[156]

Wesley's preachers, as was observed earlier, were not allowed to administer the sacraments. The grounds for Wesley's position were theological and practical. The urgent need was for lay-preaching "because I conceive there is an absolute necessity for it; inasmuch as, were it not, thousands of souls would perish everlastingly."[157] The sacraments could be received at the Church; and therefore, there was no necessity for lay-administering. Wesley went so far as to say that even if this was not possible, the sacraments are not absolutely indispensable for salvation.[158] If the lay-preachers were to administer the sacraments, it would make separation from the Church of England an almost certainty, and Wesley wished to avoid this at all costs. However, the main reason for Wesley's refusal to allow his lay-preachers to administer the sacraments was his rigid distinction between the Priestly and Prophetic ministry. In a

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[155] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 261. cf. Rules of a Helper, Ibid., pp. 309-310.

[156] Minutes, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 325.

[157] Letters, Vol. III, p. 186.

[158] Ibid.

sermon preached as late as 1789 Wesley shows that he maintained this distinction to the end. He states that the preachers were received as prophets, not as priests:

> And those who imagine these offices to be inseparably joined are totally ignorant of the constitution of the whole Jewish as well as the Christian Church. Neither the Romish, nor the English, nor the Presbyterian Churches ever accounted them so.[159]

The duty of the preachers was to preach and "as long as Methodists keep to this plan, they cannot separate from the Church."[160] In maintaining this distinction Wesley believed he was being true to the doctrine of the New Testament and the early Church:

> But I do not find that ever the office of an Evangelist was the same with that of a Pastor, frequently called a Bishop. He presided over the flock, and administered the sacraments: the former assisted him, and preached the word, either in one or more congregations. I cannot prove from any part of the New Testament, or from any author of the three first centuries, that the office of an Evangelist gave any man a right to act as a Pastor or a Bishop. I believe these offices were considered as quite distinct from each other till the time of Constantine.[161]

Therefore, he pleads with his preachers to stick to preaching:

> Ye were, fifty years ago, those of you that were then Methodist Preachers, extraordinary messengers of God, not going in your own will, but thrust out, not to supersede, but to 'provoke to jealousy,' the ordinary messengers. In God's name, stop there![162]

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[159] The Ministerial Office, Works, Vol. VII, p. 277.

[160] Ibid., p. 278.

[161] Ibid., pp. 275-276. cf. Chapter I in the discussion concerning Wesley's use of the term 'Evangelist'.

[162] Ibid., p. 280. cf. Moore's Life of Wesley, Vol. II, After hearing Wesley preach this sermon, Moore commented to Wesley: "'Sir, you know, that the Evangelists, Timothy and Titus were ordered by the Apostle to ordain Bishops in every place; and surely, they could not impart to them an authority which they did not themselves possess.' - He looked earnestly at me for some time, but not with displeasure. He made no reply, and soon introduced another subject. I said no more. The man of one book

It is obvious from Wesley's many letters on this subject that a number of the preachers were not happy with his ruling. To those who protested that they felt it their duty to administer the sacraments Wesley retorted that he believed it to be a sin, and therefore, would not tolerate it. Because they persisted in practicing what he believed to be contrary to the Word of God and destructive to the work of God, Wesley felt he had no alternative but to expel them from the Society.[163]

Wesley cannot be defended in his radical distinction between the Word and the Sacrament. Moore was right in disagreeing with Wesley's interpretation of Scripture at this point. There is no scriptural warrant for the distinction which Wesley made between the priestly and the prophetic office. On the other hand, Wesley had good ground for stressing the expediency of his preachers not administering the sacraments in order to prevent separation from the Church of England.

In the same way that Wesley was called to defend the practice of field-preaching he had to defend his preachers also. In his sermon, A Caution Against Bigotry, Wesley submits that the true test of a preacher is not whether or not he is ordained but whether or not his preaching results in his hearers being converted. "I allow, that it is highly expedient, whoever preaches in His name should have an outward as well as an inward call; but that it is absolutely necessary, I deny."[164] In the third section of his Farther Appeal, Wesley shows that there is ample precedent for lay-preachers. In his argument he refers to the

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would not dispute against it. I believe he saw his love to the church, from which he never deviated unnecessarily, had, in this instance led him a little too far." p. 340. This passage is also quoted in Chapter I.

[163] Letters, Vol. III, pp. 186-187. cf. Ibid., Vol. V, p. 330; Vol. VII, p. 213.

[164] S, Vol. II, p. 119.

Scribes in the Old Testament, to Paul and Barnabas in the New Testament, to John Calvin in the sixteenth century, to the Roman Catholic lay-brothers, to the Protestant Churches throughout Europe who require a man to preach for at least a year before he is ordained. Wesley then turns to the practice within the Church of England. He reminds his readers that every Sunday laymen are assisting in the services of worship, and the parish-clerk often reads one of the Lessons. "Perhaps it will be said, 'But this is not preaching.' Yes, but it is essentially such. For what is it to preach, but praedicare verbum Dei; 'to publish the word of God?'"[165]

Wesley believed that God's gracious offer of salvation was to all. But the Church was failing in its responsibility to take this gospel to all. Therefore, Wesley himself preached the gospel at every possible opportunity and called sons in the gospel to assist him:

> Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven upon earth.[166]

Itinerancy

Wesley's concern for the gospel was the initial reason for the itinerancy of his own ministry and the system which he used for his preachers. In attempting to promote vital, practical Christianity Wesley very early on realized the sheer physical impossibility of the task which confronted him. Thus it was that he permitted suitable laymen to assist him in his mission to the British Isles:

> But, as the persons so qualified were few and those who wanted their assistance very many, it followed that most of these were obliged to travel continually from place to

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[165] Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 221-222.

[166] Letters, Vol. VI, p. 272.

> place; and this occasioned several regulations from time to time, which were chiefly made in our Conference.[167]

As the impact of this itinerant ministry became apparent, Wesley believed that this means of evangelism was an essential part of his mission and should be retained despite all its many difficulties: "So great a blessing has from the beginning attended the labours of these itinerants, that we have been more and more convinced every year of the more than lawfulness of this proceeding."[168]

The constant moving of ministers was regarded as a means of edifying the church in love:

> No preacher shall remain in the same circuit more than two years together, and few of them more than one year. Some, indeed, have imagined that this was a hindrance to the work of God: but long experience, in every part of the kingdom, proves the contrary. This has always shown that the people profit less by any one person than by a variety of Preachers.[169]

Not all the preachers, or indeed all the members of the various societies, agreed with Wesley. He received many requests from preachers who preferred to stay where they were instead of constantly moving to another situation. "I have the credit of stationing the preachers. But many of them go where they will go for all me."[170] But Wesley was adament that itinerancy was beneficial in fulfilling the evangelistic task and insisted that it be adhered to: "We are called to be itinerant. Those who receive us must receive us as such."[171] And we recall the primary purpose of the itinerant ministry was to preach the gospel to all:

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[167] Ibid., Vol. III, p. 192.

[168] Ibid.

[169] On God's Vineyard, Works, Vol. VII, p. 208.

[170] Letters, Vol. V, p. 196.

[171] Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 131.

"It is a shame for any Methodist preacher to confine himself to one place. We are debtors to all the world."[172]

Christian Nurture

Wesley saw the task of Christian nurture as an integral part of the task of evangelism. A newly converted Christian "is like a new-born child, and needs as careful nursing."[173] The end of evangelism is holiness; and therefore, evangelism is concerned not only that man should be born again but that he should grow in grace toward the perfect man. Wesley regarded it as nothing short of demonic merely to awaken men without building them up in the faith.[174] Those who are awakened and left to themselves succumb to an even deeper sleep: "I was more convinced than ever that the preaching like an apostle, without joining together those that are awakened and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer."[175]

Wesley came to affirm the advantages of meeting in small groups for the purpose of fellowship and instruction, as early as 1730 when he read The Country Parson's Advice to his Parishioners:

> There I read these words; 'If good men of the Church will unite together in the several parts of the Kingdom, disposing themselves into friendly societies, and engaging each other in their respective combinations to be helpful to each other in all good, Christian ways, it will be the most effectual means for restoring our decaying Christianity to its primitive life and vigour and the supporting of our tottering and sinking Church.'[176]

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[172] Ibid., p. 3.

[173] Ibid., Vol. V, p. 77.

[174] Journal, Vol. III, p. 71.

[175] Ibid., Vol. V, p. 26.

[176] Letters, Vol. IV, p. 119. Wesley adds, "a few young gentlemen approved of and followed this advice." Wesley included this anonymous book in his Christian Library, Vol. XXVI, p. 427f.

Wesley was determined to gather his converts into small groups and by oversight, instruction, fellowship, and discipline build them up in the faith. In this respect Wesley was markedly different in his approach from the other leading evangelist in eighteenth century England, namely, George Whitefield. Commenting on his decision to send preachers to North America, Wesley observes that despite the vast number of people who had been influenced by the preaching of George Whitefield, most of them had fallen away:

> And what wonder? for it was a true saying, which was common in the ancient Church, 'The soul and body make a man; and the spirit and discipline make a Christian.' But those who were more or less affected by Mr. Whitefield's preaching had no discipline at all. . . . They were formed into no societies: They had no Christian connexion with each other, nor were ever taught to watch over each other's souls.[177]

When Wesley's preachers went to America, they immediately set about caring for the spiritual welfare of those who responded to their preaching:

> Those who were desirous to save their souls were no longer a rope of sand, but clave to one another, and began to watch over each other in love. Societies were formed, and Christian discipline introduced in all its branches.[178]

There is no need for us to rehearse the development of the various groups, the experiments that were tried and either retained or abandoned.[179]

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[177] The Work of God in North America, Works, Vol. VII, p. 411. Wesley's point is well taken but it should be added that Whitefield's converts were usually united with existing denominations in America. He did not make them 'Calvinistic Methodists,' and so they were not so clearly visible.

[178] Ibid., p. 412.

[179] For Wesley's account of the origin of the Societies and the several stages of development into classes and groups of one kind and another see A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 250f. cf. The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies, (1743), Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 269-271.

It is important to notice the diversity of the groups and how each group arose out of a particular need. There were the general societies, the classes, various kinds of bands, select societies, and a penitents class. The most important thing to notice is that the ground of Wesley's concern was theological and that he set about implementing what he believed to be fundamental to the task of evangelism. If the Church had been awake to its responsibilities, there would have been no need for Wesley to organize and introduce the various groups. Wesley reminded the clergy that their task and his was not only to preach, important as that was, but also to:

> 'Seek and save that which is lost;' to bring souls from Satan to God; to instruct the ignorant; to reclaim the wicked; to convince the gainsayer; to direct their feet into the way of peace, and then keep them therein; to follow them step by step, lest they turn out of the way, and advise them in their doubts and temptations; to lift up them that fall; to refresh them that are faint; and to comfort the weak-hearted; to administer various helps, as the variety of occasions require, according to their several necessities.[180]

Resulting from Wesley's setting up of societies and other smaller groups, was the charge that he was bringing about a division in the Church. Wesley's reply is to the point:

> (1) These were not Christians before they were thus joined. Most of them barefaced Heathens. (2) Neither are they Christians, from whom you suppose them to be divided. You will not look me in the face and say that they are. What! drunken Christians! cursing and swearing Christians! lying Christians! cheating Christians! . . . (3) Neither are they divided any more than they were before, even from these wretched devil Christians. They are as ready as ever to perform every office of real kindness towards them.[181]

To the charge that he was destroying the Christian fellowship which existed among the true Christians in the parish, Wesley countercharged that Christian fellowship was non-existent and he could hardly

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[180] A Farther Appeal, Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 177-178.

[181] A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists, Works, Vol. VIII, p. 251.

destroy that which did not exist:

> Which of those true Christians had any such fellowship with these? Who watched over them in love? Who marked their growth in grace? Who advised and exhorted them from time to time? Who prayed with them and for them, as they had need? This, and this alone is Christian fellowship: But alas! where is it to be found? Look east or west, north or south; name what parish you please: Is this Christian fellowship there? Rather, are not the bulk of the parishioners a mere rope of sand?[182]

Wesley was anxious not to separate from the Church of England, but he felt very keenly his responsibility to those who had responded to his preaching and to that of his assistants. As has already been shown, Wesley urged the members of the Societies to attend the parish church (and, in the case of dissenters, the meeting house) and instructed his helpers to organize the various groups at times other than when regular Church services were held. The nurture provided by the small groups was regarded by Wesley as over and above that provided by the Church. The former was not to take the place of the latter. "Together with these helps, which are peculiar to their own society, they have all those which enjoyed in common by the other members of the Church of England."[183] Wesley believed that the concept of ecclesiolae in ecclesia, small groups of believers coming together on a voluntary basis, could provide the nurture which was not forthcoming from the normal ministrations of the Church, and in addition be a direct challenge to the formalism of the Church. Outler suggests that:

> Wesley's idea of the Methodist societies serving the Established Church even against the good will of her leaders was a distinctive adaptation of the pietistic patterns of the "religious societies" (ecclesiolae in ecclesiam) which Anthony

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[182] Ibid.

[183] Works, Vol. VII, p. 208.

> Horneck had brought from Germany to England in 1661 and which had served as a refuge for "serious Christians" discontent with apathetic and nominal Christianity.[184]

One thing is certain: it is that the grouping of people into Societies and the subsequent developments which took place under the genius of Wesley grew directly out of mission. Wesley had no preconceived idea of setting up another communion when his mission began. His desire was to present men perfect in Christ Jesus and his concern to nurture the converts arose out of his understanding of the goal of the Christian life.[185]

Discipline played a dominant role in the societies and classes. "Preaching gathered in, but discipline and exhortation separated the wheat from the chaff."[186] Christian doctrine and Christian discipline must go hand in hand together.[187] Whilst the single requirement for membership was "a desire 'to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins'" there were three major qualifications added. Those desirous of membership were to refrain from all evil; they were to practice works of mercy, and they were expected to attend upon all the ordinances of God. Those who failed to do this were admonished but if they showed no signs of mending their ways, they were expelled from the society.[188] Societies and classes were not only ways of promoting holiness; they were also agencies of evangelism.

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[184] John Wesley, p. 307. Outler notes that Horneck (1641-1697) was a German Lutheran who became preacher at the Savoy in 1670 and chaplain to William III in 1689.

[185] Works, Vol. VII, p. 207.

[186] Notes on the New Testament, Mt. 13:45.

[187] Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity, Works, Vol. VII, p. 285.

[188] Works, Vol. VIII, pp. 270-271.

That Wesley was aware that the same paralyzing formalism which he attacked so vehemently in the Church could also invade the Societies is clear from his challenge to the Methodists:

> If you are a member of the society, do you make a full use of your privilege? Do you never fail to meet your class, and that not as matter of form, but expecting that when you are met together in his name, your Lord will be in the midst of you?[189]

Wesley's concern for and provision of Christian nurture was undoubtedly one of the major reasons for the continued impact of the Revival and the phenomenal growth of the Wesleyan Methodist movement even after his death. As Wesley himself observed:

> It can scarce be conceived what advantages have been reaped from this little prudential regulation. Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to 'bear one another's burdens' and naturally to 'care for each other.' As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other. And 'speaking the truth in love, they grew up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplied, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, increased unto the edifying itself in love.'[190]

Wesley's theology, and in this instance his emphasis on sanctification, was expressed in his ecclesiology. He believed that the gathering together of believers in fellowship for mutual examination, encouragement and service was indispensable for the life of the Church. His evangelism was consistently oriented toward holiness:

> This is the great work: not only to bring souls to believe in Christ but to build them up in our most holy faith. How grievously are they mistaken who imagine that as soon as the children are born they need take no more care of them! We do not find it so. The chief care then begins.[191]

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[189] Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 213.

[190] Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 254.

[191] Letters, Vol. V, p. 344.

Wesley's concept of ecclesiolae in ecclesia fulfilled a three-fold purpose. In the first place it afforded a community of support where Christians could grow towards maturity in Christ. Secondly, it was a place to which those 'who desire to be saved' could be invited, in the hope that the warmth and vigor of the society would help them to find their salvation in Christ. Thirdly, it served as an excellent training ground for potential leaders and preachers who could carry forward the work of evangelism.

Hymns

In discussing the means of evangelism employed by John Wesley, Franz Hildebrandt notes the immense contribution made by Charles Wesley. "And his brother provided him with an additional means of communication which ever since has proved its singular efficiency: the means for Methodists to sing their faith."[192] Methodism was born in song, and its remarkable growth must in no small measure be attributed to the hymns of Charles Wesley.

During their life time the Wesleys published a large number of hymn books, the best known of which is that published in 1780 under the title, A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists.[193] In the Preface John Wesley describes the collection of 525 hymns as "a little body of experimental and practical divinity."[194] He recommended this collection "to every pious reader as a means of raising and quickening the spirit of devotion, of confirming his faith, of enlivening

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[192] Christianity according to the Wesleys, (London: Epworth Press, 1955), pp. 51-52.

[193] List of Poetical Works, Works, Vol. XIV, p. 339.

[194] Ibid., p. 340.

his hope, and of kindling or increasing his love to God. and man."[195]

There are five sections in the 1780 hymn book, the first two of which may be described as missionary hymns. Rattenbury comments:

> Wesley could not visualize Methodism as anything but a Society for the evangelization of England and then of the world. He wanted the people who had been gathered into the fold to remain supremely interested in the ingathering of others. He had no wish that his Society should survive except as an organ of evangelism; hence he placed his hymns of exhortation in the forefront, entitled as they are by the moving words, 'Exhorting and Beseeching Sinners to return to God.'[196]

The hymns of Methodism "had also an important pedagogical value as means of communicating doctrine and this came to be the sung creeds of the Methodists."[197] This is born out in the Contents of the 1780 hymn book. Part IV is for Believers and relates to every possible contingency. When it is kept in mind that the great majority of Methodists were ordinary unlettered men, it may be assumed that there were many whose training in practical divinity owed more to the poetry of Charles than to the prose of John.

Wesley thought of the hymn book not only as a devotional aid but also as a tool for evangelism. The hymns could be read and sung not only by those who had already been found by Christ, but also by those who were seeking salvation. The great evangelical doctrines preached by John were transposed into personal, poetic form by Charles and lent popular appeal to the Methodist movement. This Prudential Means was also regarded by Wesley as both a converting and confirming means. The

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[195] Ibid., p. 342.

[196] Evangelical Doctrines, p. 75.

[197] Davies, Worship and Theology in England, Vol. III, p. 201.

purpose of the hymns of Methodism was both 'to raise and to quicken the spirit of devotion.'

Special Services

There are three special services which Wesley introduced into regular Methodist usage, none of which were intended to take the place of the regular Church services. They are Love Feasts, Watch-night services and the Covenant service. The first two were borrowed from the Moravians; "The early Church practice of the '_agapae_' and the '_vigiliae_' came into Methodism from the Moravians as the Love Feast and the Watch-night services."[198]

According to his _Journal_, it was when he was in Georgia that Wesley first instituted the Love Feast.[199] Later he wrote describing the service as it was conducted in the early years of the Revival and the benefits accruing therefrom:

> To increase in them a grateful sense of all his mercies I desired that, one evening in a quarter all the men in band, and on the second, all the women would meet; and on a third, both men and women together; that we might together 'eat bread' as the ancient Christians did 'with gladness and singleness of heart.' At these love-feasts (so we termed them, retaining the name as well as the thing, which was in use from the beginning) our food is only a little plain cake and water. But we seldom return from them without being fed, not only with the 'meat which perisheth,' but with 'that which endureth unto everlasting life.'[200]

Love Feasts were held monthly or quarterly, usually on Sunday evenings. As was his custom, Wesley adapted the service which he took over from the Moravians to meet the particular needs of his Society.

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[198] _A History of the Methodist Church_, p. 52.

[199] _Journal_, Vol. I, pp. 425-426. cf. _Letters_, Vol. II, p. 302.

[200] _A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists_, _Works_, Vol. VIII, pp. 258-259.

"Wesley adopted the idea and extended it. Under his adaptation it included the whole Society, it consisted largely of testimonies to encourage fellow-Christians, and it even became a converting ordinance."[201]

In 1748 Wesley described how the first Methodist Watch-night service came about. It had come to his attention that several members of the society at Kingswood sometimes spent the greater part of the night in prayer and praise. This invoked criticism from some who urged him to put a stop to this practice. But Wesley went to Kingswood and participated in the service there and because he found that many were helped he commended this form of service to all the societies. From then on Watch-night services were held monthly, usually on a Friday night. In response to those who charged that people only attended because of the novelty of the service, Wesley pointed out that the important thing was that those who were helped at these services had not fallen away. He went further:

> If I can probably conjecture, that either by the novelty of this ancient custom, or by any other indifferent circumstance, it is in my power to "save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins," am I clear before God if I do not, if I do not snatch that brand out of the burning?[202]

Thus the Watch-night services, like the Love Feasts were not only for the building up of believers, but were converting ordinances as well.

The Covenant service, which in revised form is still held on the first Sunday of the year in many churches throughout the world, was not borrowed from Moravianism but from Puritanism. We are fortunate once again in that Wesley records how Methodists first came to use the Covenant service. In August, 1755, Wesley carefully explained to the congregation in London the meaning of the Covenant service and gave instruction for

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[201] Davies, Worship and Theology in England, Vol. III, p. 192.

[202] Works, Vol. VIII, p. 256.

several days as to how one ought to approach this service. After a special fast on the Friday, the first Covenant service held by Wesley was conducted on the following Monday at six in the evening:

> We met for that purpose in the French church in Spitalfields. After I had recited the tenor of the covenant proposed, in the words of that blessed man, Richard Alleine, all the people stood up, in token of assent, to the number of about eighteen hundred. Such a night I scarce ever knew before. Surely the fruit of it shall remain for ever.[203]

This was and still remains a most solemn service. "In brief it was the declaration not of fides but of fiducia. It was not only an affair of the heart but of the will. It committed the believer not only to give God the first place in his affections but also to follow His commandments."[204]

The intention of the Covenant service sums up very well Wesley's over-all mission. He believed that the Christian way was not merely an intellectual assent to the truths of Scripture and the ancient creeds, nor merely the experience of a warmed heart. God's will for man was that he should be holy and this involved loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength and one's neighbor as one's self. In other words, the Christian way was a way of life, a new way of life made possible by God's grace in Jesus Christ. Wesley sought by every means to bring men into this new life and to assist him to maturity. God had laid down specific means in Scripture by which this new life could begin and be maintained, and Wesley urged all men to attend all these means regularly. But God's grace was not limited to the Instituted Means. There were other means

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[203] Short History of the People called Methodists, Works, Vol. XIII, p. 337. Wesley was indebted partly to Joseph and partly to Richard Alleine. cf. Rupert Davies in Theology, Vol. LXIV, pp. 62-68.

[204] Worship and Theology in England, Vol. III, p. 199.

which if adjudged prudent, that is, were neither contrary to Scripture nor reason, could be the channels of God's grace. Essentially an adaptor rather than an innovator, Wesley eagerly took over ideas from a variety of sources. Having made them his own he applied them with such single-mindedness and imagination that they came alive with renewed and increased force. They were used only so long as they met Wesley's one aim: to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown that contrary to general belief, Wesley was an evangelist long before May 24, 1738. As early as 1725 Wesley believed that he had a special call from God. From this time on he was persuaded that man's highest end was to glorify God and this he understood to imply a life of holiness. However, Wesley's search for holiness and his evangelistic fervor coincided. This was because he believed that the life of holiness was necessary in order that man might be a worthy instrument in God's reconciling work in the world. Wesley thought that the holier a man became the more fitted he would be in the service of God. This explains in part his desperate concern to save his own soul. Only then would he be able to fulfill God's intention for his life, namely, to glorify God in the service of man. The end of holiness was evangelism, just as the end of evangelism was to produce holiness. This is best expressed in a hymn written by his brother Charles and included at the end of Wesley's sermon on Christian Perfection. The third stanza reads as follows:

> That I thy mercy may proclaim
> that all mankind thy truth may see,
> Hallow thy great and glorious name,
> And perfect holiness in me.[1]

Thirteen years later Wesley came to see that the way to holiness lay not in self-effort but solely through God's grace received by faith. It was at Aldersgate that it was brought home powerfully to him that man is justified by faith alone. God not only summons a man to the life of

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[1] Works, Vol. VI, p. 20.

holiness but by His action in Jesus Christ makes holiness a possibility for man. The word of command is also the word of promise. Wesley was an evangelist long before Aldersgate, but now he is no longer merely a servant and takes his place within the family of God. His impetus towards evangelism is as real as ever, but now it is grounded not only in his desire to be obedient but also upon the mercy of God which makes this obedience possible. Holiness is still central in Wesley's thought but now it is the goal, not the basis of the Christian life.

It is significant that although Wesley placed great stress on repentance and acceptance of God's forgiveness and new power in Jesus Christ, he never formalised the way in which man comes to faith. Unfortunately many who have followed Wesley have not always been as wise. Methodist Churches in many nations have singled out May 24 as the occasion for special services where the emphasis is upon Wesley's particular experience rather than upon the grace of God. In addition, American Methodism has a full scale program every twenty-five years to celebrate the so-called Aldersgate Anniversary. The last of these was in 1963 entitled, 20th Century Aldersgate. This deliberate isolation of Aldersgate has serious consequences. In the first place, it distorts the place and meaning of Aldersgate in the totality of Wesley's life and ministry. Second, it conveys the notion that the meaningful basis for true, vital Christianity is reducible to a personal, private conversion experience. Thirdly, it sends men and women in a pathetic search to light a flame to warm their hearts.

Despite the far reaching results of Wesley's memorable experience at Aldersgate he did not relate ad nauseum the form of his experience and establish it as a paradigm for all to follow. Instead he witnessed to the

love of God for all men. He never divorced his experience from the witness of Scripture, the heritage of the historic church, her creeds and sacraments. Nor did he stress one to the exclusion or even the subordination of the other. In 1787 Wesley wrote prophetically about the future of the Methodist Church:

> I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist, either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit and discipline with which they first set out.[2]

This is not to infer that experience was not important for Wesley. It is to say that Wesley had a balanced concept of the church's ministry which includes experience but always held in tension with doctrine, practice and discipline. This is evident in the records of Wesley's own work. It is succinctly summarized in a statement attributed to Wesley:

> Preach our doctrines, inculcate experience, urge practice, enforce discipline. If you preach doctrine only, the people will be antinomians; if you preach experience only they will become enthusiasts; if you preach practice only they will become pharisees; and if you preach all of these and do not enforce discipline, Methodism will be like a highly cultivated garden without a fence, exposed to the ravages of the wild boar of the forest.[3]

Evangelism is a legitimate task for the Church today. Wesley engaged earnestly in that task and by so doing he placed his experience in context. In order to fulfill the evangelistic task in the twentieth century, it is not necessary to point men to Aldersgate, or to the Black Tower at Wittenburg, or even to the Damascus Road, but to the saving grace

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[2] Thoughts Upon Methodism, Works, Vol. XIII, p. 258.

[3] Franz Hildebrandt, Christianity According to the Wesleys, (London: Epworth Press, 1955), p. 12. Hildebrandt adds in a footnote, "I have not been able to verify this quotation which has the authentic ring of Wesley and appears under an early picture of Nicolson Square Church, Edinburgh."

of God in His Son Jesus Christ.

Winthrop Hudson in describing the decline of revivalism refers to the death of Dwight L. Moody as the end of an era. He continues: "The noble succession of Edwards and the Wesleys, of Whitefield and the Tennants, of Lyman Beecher and Charles G. Finney had now come to an end."[4] It is regrettable that Wesley should be linked with the nineteenth century revivalists in this way. This identification of Wesley with the nineteenth century is reflected in popular thought which tends to view Wesley through nineteenth century spectacles. The result is that advocates of the methods used by nineteenth century revivalists often claim Wesley as one of their authorities. Further, critics of these revivalists sometimes include Wesley in their criticism and are consequently closed to any contribution which Wesley may have to make in the area of evangelism. But when we take note of the excesses and abuses inherent in the nature of revivalism, it can be shown very convincingly that Wesley's evangelism is very far removed from these.

Hudson lists these abuses in the book to which reference has already been made.[5] He argues that two things are required of the revivalist. In the first place, he is forced to a simplistic reduction of the complex situation in which an individual finds himself to a clear choice between two obvious alternatives, that is, the decision is between black and white, never a choice of greys. Secondly, he must appeal to the masses, therefore, the content of his message must be aimed at the lowest common denominator. Consequently, the tendency of the revivalist was to

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[4] The Great Tradition of the American Churches, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 137.

[5] Ibid., p. 147f.

present a shallow gospel almost devoid of theological content. The flight from reason was automatic and complete. But, as we have seen, Wesley had far too much respect and regard for theology and reason to be placed in this category.

A third pressure was to be overly concerned with results and a readiness to justify whatever produced them. The end justified the means, no matter how crude or unworthy. We have seen, however, that the means which Wesley employed were informed by his theological understanding of the gospel. Every means of evangelism employed by Wesley had to meet the test of Scripture.

Revivalism, with its stress on securing a decision tends to give the impression that somehow man can save himself by 'deciding for Christ.' "Ultimately the unaided effort of the human will came to be regarded as sufficient to gain divine grace, and the self-sufficient individual emerged in the drama of redemption as the captain of his own soul."[6] But Wesley held in tension the principle of Sola Gratia and human responsibility with his doctrine of Prevenient Grace. To the question of what part God plays and what part man plays in salvation, Wesley consistently held that salvation is completely dependent upon the initiative of God.

One of the worst features of revivalism was the stereotyping of conversion. The new birth was limited to a "conversion which takes place on Sunday morning during the singing of the last hymn or twice a year when the revival preacher comes to town."[7] The so-called "altar-call" is still a feature in many Methodist Churches today. It also remains very popular at evangelistic campaigns supported by a large number of denominations.

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[6] Ibid., p. 148.

[7] Richard H. Niebuhr, Kingdom of God in America, (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Co., 1937), p. 179. Cited by Winthrop Hudson, p. 148.

There is only a single reference to anything resembling an altar-call in the entire Wesleyan corpus: "Towards the close of the sermon, I asked 'Which of you give yourself, soul and body, to God?' One cried out, with such a cry that almost shook the house, 'Oh, I will, I will.' And as soon as she could stand, she came forth in the midst, to witness it before all the congregation."[8] It is highly probable that even in this instance Wesley's question was rhetorical. He continues: "Perceiving this was an acceptable time, I laid aside my design of meeting the society, and continued in prayer with the whole congregation, all our hearts being as the heart of one man."[9] In other words, the practice of concluding a service (whether it be in a tent, or public hall, or church building) with an appeal for a public decision for Christ, or the more traditional altar-call during the singing of the last hymn, cannot be claimed to be Wesleyan in origin.

Revivalism was excessively individualistic to the detriment of the corporate understanding of man and the neglect of the Church and sacraments. Although Wesley's evangelism involved a direct confrontation of the individual, it was never individualistic. "The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness."[10] Furthermore, the revivalist's conception of God was ultra-transcendental. Wesley countered any such tendency by emphasizing the doctrines of creation and providence as well as regeneration and by a stress on the sacramental life.

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[8] Journal, Vol. III, p. 405.

[9] Ibid.

[10] The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley, (London: 1868), Vol. i, p. xxii.

The greatest single factor which prevented Wesley's evangelism from becoming partial and fragmentary was his refusal to leave the Church of England. He did the work of an evangelist within the Church of England despite the almost intolerable tensions which his irregular practices produced. The Methodists were not in opposition to the Church, but existed as an evangelistic order within the Church and served as a constant and sometimes uncomfortable reminder to the Church of her responsibilities in the world.

From 1738 onwards Wesley gave himself unstintingly to the task of evangelism. He regarded himself, and his helpers, as extraordinary messengers called of God to summon the Church to be obedient to her true calling, to be in fact, the Body of Christ, broken for a hungry world. Everything was now subservient to the aim of proclaiming the gospel. Denied the access of most pulpits, he preached to small groups of people at times other than the regular church services. On a momentous day in Bristol he took to preaching in the fields. It is worthy of note that Wesley proceeded to irregular practices with reluctance and only when he was sure that whatever he undertook would be in the service of the gospel. This is certainly true of his use of lay-preachers. But once the decision was taken, Wesley did everything in his power to use laymen to the full and the provide the best possible training for them. Classes, Bands, and Societies soon followed. Although Wesley had remarkable organizing ability, he never allowed organization to obscure the fundamental questions. Theological reflection was central in his understanding of his mission. The secret of his ministry lies not in the genius of his organization but in his awareness that the Evangel is prior to evangelism.

The primary source of Wesley's theology was Scripture. It was here that he found the central emphases of the gospel which he proclaimed. But he was consciously indebted to the Early Fathers, as well as to the creeds, Articles of Religion and the Homilies of his church. Wesley focused on the fundamentals of the faith. His emphasis was upon the main design of God's deed in Jesus Christ, the shape of man's need and the character of the new life into which man is summoned by God's deed. This last points to the circularity in Wesley's thought. Not only is the end of holiness evangelism, but the end of evangelism is holiness. God's purpose for the believer is that he should be holy. God's design is the restoration of the relationship which man enjoyed with his Creator before the fall. This holiness is none other than love for God and for men made possible through God's love in Jesus Christ for all men.

Wesley's equation of holiness with love meant that he never felt he should encourage Christians to flee from the world. "William Law forsook the whole world for prayerful seclusion; Wesley . . . went hot-footed out after the world."[11] Wesley maintained that "Christ does not take away human society but sanctifies it."[12] The biblical view of conversion envisages a two-fold movement, the turning away from the world in the sense that the world is preoccupied with self-interest, and the turning towards the world in terms of the needs and concerns of the neighbor. Traditional evangelism has concentrated on the first movement. Although Wesley was fully aware of the need to turn from the world which erects standards and values which are contrary to the spirit of the gospel,

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[11] L.P. Curtis, Anglican Moods of the Eighteenth Century, (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966), p. 59.

[12] Notes on the New Testament, John 2:2, p. 308.

he also emphasized the need to turn toward the world, seen from the perspective of Christ's sacrificial death on behalf of the world.

It is significant that two of the primary aspects of Wesley's theology and practive have fallen into disrepute, namely, evangelism and holiness. The former is often regarded with grave suspicion as the manipulation of persons by a series of highly specialized and organized techniques, while the latter is considered by some to be a mark of fanaticism and by others as a fatal lapse from the Reformation principles of sola gratia and sola fidei. That there is a species of evangelism which deserves suspicion and refutation cannot be denied. But as we have seen, the means of evangelism used by Wesley were informed by his understanding of the gospel. Further, from 1738 onwards, Wesley accepted the Reformation principles of sola gratia and sola fidei and never departed from this position. The only reason why he preached holiness as the goal of the Christian life was because of his fidelity to the third Reformation principle, namely, sola Scriptura. Also, the circularity in Wesley's thought prevented him from the possible excesses and abuses which sometimes accompany evangelism and the emphasis on holiness. The end of holiness is evangelism not a preoccupation with one's spiritual temperature. The end of evangelism is holiness of life which issues forth, not in a pharisaic isolationism, but in works of compassion on behalf of the neighbor.

Wesley's evangelism was characterized by authenticity and relevance. To put it in another way, Wesley's understanding of the evangelistic task was informed by two poles. The givenness of Divine revelation as witnessed to in Scripture and the teaching of the Church on the one hand, and his concern for the world to which this saving Word is addressed, on the other. His theology of evangelism was in the context of the ever fresh

encounter of the living Word of God with men in their total humanity. Consequently, when men described God as remote or unconcerned, or restricted his love to a few, or drew a rigid distinction between faith and the holy life, or failed to preach the gospel entrusted to them, Wesley's urgency took on a greater intensity. With renewed passion he affirmed that God had acted in Jesus Christ for all men and that his purpose for man was that he should be holy. To his own church he declared that their justification for existence was to proclaim the astounding declaration of God's love for sinful man. Wesley's sense of urgency which was conveyed to him by the gospel itself, was sharpened by his awareness of the human situation to which God's Word is addressed.

A final factor which accounted for the urgency which characterized Wesley's ministry was his sense of immediacy. He cared nothing for the past, and he is not concerned with the future: "My part is to improve the present moment."[13] In his correspondence, Wesley stressed the importance of the Now with almost monotonous regularity: "But I take no thought for the morrow. Today I am determined by His grace to do the work of Him that sent me."[14] He wrote to his wife: "Let you and I improve today, the morrow will take thought for the things itself . . . While we live, let us live."[15] This sense of immediacy was maintained to the very end. Less than a year

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[13] Letters, Vol. II, p. 94.

[14] Ibid., Vol. III, p. 176. cf. Wesley Hymn Book, p. 51, stanza 2.

To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfil:
O may it all my pow'rs engage
To do my master's will!

[15] Ibid., p. 177. cf. Ibid., p. 180: "I want to be on the full stretch for God."

before he died, Wesley wrote: "But who knows what a year may (bring) forth? It may carry both me and you and them into a better world! Therefore let us live today!"[16] Because no man can recall the past, and because no one knows what the future holds, there is time only for the essentials. In the midst of time Wesley was acutely aware of Eternity. Therefore, he assessed his priorities and gave first place to the proclamation of the gospel:

> Live thou today. Be it thy earnest care to improve the present hour. This is your own; and it is your all. The past is as nothing, as though it had never been. The future is nothing to you: it is not yours; perhaps it will never be . . . Therefore live today: lose not an hour . . . Enjoy the very, very now, by enjoying Him, 'whose years fail not.' Now let thine eye be singly fixed on Him in 'whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning'! Now give him thy heart; now stay thyself on Him; now be thou holy, as He is holy. Now lay hold on the blessed opportunity of doing His acceptable and perfect will![17]

Evangelism requires not only theological reflection but also careful thought concerning means of communication. The problem of communication is that of how, humanly speaking, Christ can be set forth in categories of thought and media which are meaningful to the auditors. Reference has been made to the very useful distinction which Wesley makes between the Instituted and Prudential Means of evangelism. The former are those elements of the church's life such as the kerygma, sacraments, worship and the apostolic discipline. The latter are those which may arise out of the actual situation in which the work of evangelism is being done. Wesley ensured that the latter would in no way contradict the former by declaring that the Prudential Means are those "grounded on

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[16] Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 228, (July, 1790). cf. Notes on the New Testament, Rom. 9:28.

[17] Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, IX, S, Vol. I, p. 512. Italics mine.

reason and experience, in order to apply the general rules given in Scripture, according to particular circumstances."[18] Unfortunately, the church has not always maintained Wesley's distinction with the result that she has tended to regard past prudential patterns as if they were instituted for all time and thus can become a slave to her structures.

Wesley's distinction afforded him several advantages. For example, he refused to accept England's old parochial system and did not feel bound to the borders of one particular parish and as a result, he enjoyed a mobility which enabled him to take the church to the people. Secondly, he was free to experiment, "free to meet eighteenth-century needs from his wide knowledge of precedents in the Primitive Church, and also by direct common-sense search for the best solutions."[19] Thirdly, he enjoyed a flexibility which meant that he did not become trapped by some of the earlier methods he employed. He was neither bound to the past nor to any utopian blue print of his own manufacture. Referring to the Prudential Means which he had put into use, Wesley stressed the importance of flexibility:

> That with regard to these little prudential helps we are continually changing one thing after another . . . by this means we declare them all to be merely prudential, not essential, not of divine institution. We prevent so far as in us lies, their growing formal or dead. We are always open to instruction; willing to be wiser every day than we were before, and to change whatever we can change for the better.[20]

In sum, Wesley believed that the new wine of the gospel required new wine skins and often forced the existing wine-skins to take different

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[18] Letters, Vol. II, p. 302.

[19] Frederick Hunter, John Wesley and the Coming Comprehensive Church, (London: Epworth Press, 1968), p. 51.

[20] Letters, Vol. II, p. 298.

shapes. It follows that Wesley would not necessarily hold that the Prudential Means which he employed in the eighteenth century would be appropriate for the twentieth century.

Implicit in Wesley's theology and practice of evangelism is the recognition that the concept of evangelism must be enlarged beyond the confines of verbal witness. He would be in full agreement with William Stringfellow who writes:

> Evangelism is not essentially verbal, even though it seems commonly to be believed that the recitation of certain words constitutes efficacious evangelism. Evangelism consists of loving another human being in a way which represents to him the care of God for his particular life. Evangelism rests upon the appeal to another man to remember his own creation - to remember who made him and for whom he was made. Evangelism is the event in which a Christian confronts another man in a way which assures the other man that the new life which he observes in the Christian is vouchsafed for him also.[21]

It is true that preaching enjoyed a central place in Wesley's means of evangelism but never to the exclusion of the other forms of communication. Wesley's practice suggests at least four forms of communication each of which must be held together with the other three.

1. Kerygma. The gospel must be preached. Wesley held that natural man is not only a sinner but he is unaware of his condition and the seriousness of his plight. Therefore, the church's responsibility is to help man to avail himself of the grace which opens his eyes to his need and to point him to the Christ who offers pardon and cleansing. Preaching is crucial because the Christian faith is not a philosophical system which can be worked out independently of its historic character. God has 'acted in His Son' at a particular time in history and in a particular way; and therefore,

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[21] Private and Public Faith, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) p. 54.

someone must tell the story in every generation. The preacher is one who is sent and as a man under authority, he has no choice in the matter. He must propogate the Christian truth. He is not at liberty to substitute something else of the gospel, nor does he need to fortify it with extraneous support. The vital continuity between the Incarnate Word and the written Word, must be maintained in the proclaimed Word. As Bernard Manning defined preaching: "It is a manifestation of the Incarnate Word from the Written Word by the Spoken Word; . . ."[22]

2. Koinonia. The gospel must be lived and its power embodied in the actual life of the community which claims Christ as Savior and Lord. Wesley was adament that it would be better not to bring a sinner to life unless it was also possible to nurture him in the Christian faith. The fellowship of believers was a vital ingredient in his concept of evangelism. In the kind of fellowship which Wesley tried to bring about through his societies, there was opportunity for mutual help where Christians could grow towards maturity in Christ. However, it was also a community into which the seeker could come and possibly meet the living Christ in and through the love and care of its members. Such a community, witnessing by its corporate life to the power of the new creation in Christ is like a city on a hill whose light cannot be hid.

3. Didache. When Kingswood school was opened Charles Wesley composed a hymn for the occasion. The fifth stanza admirably sums up the Wesleys' concern for the teaching ministry:

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[22] A Layman in the Ministry, (London: Independent Press, 1943), p. 138.

Unite the pair so long disjoin'd
Knowledge and vital piety,
Learning and holiness combin'd,
And truth and love let all men see
In these whom up to Thee we give,
Thine, wholly thine to die and live.[23]

John Wesley exemplified this union of knowledge and vital piety and spent himself in his attempt to actualize this in his preachers, assistants and in the membership of the societies. He was as much teacher as preacher and understood Didache to be not merely an adjunct of evangelism but as part of its very essence. Wesley never drew a false dichotomy between evangelism and Christian education. The former is barren if it be without educative result and Christian education which is not evangelistic he understood to be a contradiction in terms. It was not a case of evangelism or Christian education, but evangelism through Christian education. Therefore, he continually stressed the importance of wide reading and study. As a result of his many and varied publications which he put into the hands of his preachers and assistants and the central importance which he insisted had to be given to the teaching ministry-a mark of early Methodism was the union of 'knowledge and vital piety.'

4. Diakonia. Wesley understood that mission without humble service is a contradiction in terms. It is when Wesley speaks of holiness in terms of love that he demonstrates most clearly his understanding of Diakonia as an essential part of evangelism. To be holy is to love God and neighbor. To love the neighbor is to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, help the fatherless and the stranger, visit and minister to those that are sick or in prison. It is not only the individual who is urged

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[23] Hymns For Children, (Bristol: Farley, 1763), Hymn XL, p. 36.

to serve his neighbor. Wesley applied the concept of Diakonia to the corporate ecclesia as well. Societies were urged to care for the poorer members and also for all people irrespective of whether they belonged to the Society or not.

For Wesley, it was never a question of 'winning souls' or caring for the material needs of man. He believed that love for the neighbor implied a deep, active caring for the whole man. It was never a case of either/or but both/and. One the one hand he held Kerygma, Koinonia, Didache, and Diakonia together, emphasizing that it is the gospel which motivates service and in this way minimized the danger of succumbing to the temptation to turn stones into bread. On the other hand, he strongly condemned a profession of faith which was not accompanied with a practical love of the neighbor. To be a Christian is to be obedient to the holy God whose own Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The time has surely come when informed Methodists should rid themselves once and for all of their sense of inferiority because John Wesley was not an Aquinas or a Calvin and to recognize that Wesley's approach is of the greatest validity. He is thoroughly theological and thoroughly evangelical and never does he allow either pole to disappear. When he speaks or writes, one knows he is an evangelist who has theological reasons which inform his evangelism. As a theologian, he is a scholar who never loses sight of the fact that theology must ever be the servant of the Word. In brief, John Wesley was an evangelical theologian whose theological work was never speculative but practical. He was also an evangelical theologian whose theology informed his evangelism.

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